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ROTHERY SELFERT, Q.C.

A Novel.

BY JOHN OLLIVE,

AUTHOR OF "A WOOING OF ATÉ."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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# ROTHERY SELFERT, Q.C.

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## CHAPTER I.

“I do wish so much I could make you see it all as I do, Frank,” she said regretfully.

For they were looking at more together than the red and yellow of the fading sky, or of the old-fashioned houses and roofs that studded the banks of the silent river, still clear enough—though so near London—to give half the colour back to the generous dying day. There was a mighty black cedar in the garden where they stood, blocking with its grim stature no small part of the light that still lingered in the June sky, and pink blossoming thorn-trees were round them too; filling the night air with countless fragrance,

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as at noonday they had turned the sunlight into a myriad hum of insect life.

But there was room enough, and light enough, for him to look into the speaker's eyes, had she not told him already that there would be no answer there to satisfy the longing of his gaze.

"I wish I could make you see it all as I do," she repeated, with a sort of wonder in her tone, as if she could not quite understand how any human being could take a different view to her own of that other and more dimly outlined prospect which they were looking at together.

He was standing by her with a magnolia-blossom in his hand, which he was nervously pulling to pieces, as though more anxious to look into its shattered centre than into Lena Morden's eyes, and with a look almost of humiliation about his whole figure which he certainly did not carry off well. And yet there was no particular reason why that or any other look should have sat ill upon him,

for he was a well-looking young fellow enough, with fair light hair, and a downy face, and a clear woman's complexion—all of which must have made it difficult for him to look as sombre as he was doing at that moment.

He looked up after a moment's silence, and turned a pleading face towards the speaker.

"If you would only try, Lena dear, I am sure you would love me soon. I am certain that if you would only marry me, you would get on very well, and we should be as happy as possible."

"That is simply nonsense, Frank," she said a little scornfully, blushing, not for herself, but for him, as she listened to such language. She did not know much about the love her cousin was asking her for, but the childish prattle he was trying to deceive her with about the innocent domestic happiness that was waiting for them in the future, if she would only accept it, seemed quite con-

temptible in her ears. "Simply nonsense," she repeated with indignation.

"Very well," the boy answered almost sullenly. "Of course, most that I say is nonsense. You tell me so often enough, and in time, I suppose, I shall learn to believe it. I wonder if you ever think what is going to become of me, when I have done talking nonsense!"

"Finish the nonsense!" she answered lightly, as if trying to laugh off his earnestness, "and I will tell you. I am not going to stay out here with you any longer, you know. It is getting dark, and papa will want some music. Please try not to look so dreadfully unhappy, or they will ask you what you have been doing."

He did not seem quite to understand that she was serious in her wish to assure him that she never intended to try "being as happy as possible" in the way he suggested, and looked up again with almost a sanguine expression in his face.

"Won't you kiss me once, Lena?" he suggested, with just a shade of timidity in his voice, and yet as if he was asking no very impossible boon, after all.

"Certainly *not*," she answered in a high state of indignation. "Haven't I just told you that I haven't the slightest intention of ever becoming engaged to you? I wonder how I shall make you understand it?"

She turned away from him as she spoke, and walked straight towards the house, as if it was no part of her business to see what became of her boy-lover. But she was aware, nevertheless, that he did not follow her, but vaulted over the little wall which separated them from the road, and walked slowly and sulkily away without a word of farewell. So she was merciful, and called out "Good-night" in a voice which must have reached his ears, though he did not turn, or even answer it.

She felt half-repentant as she entered the house, and began to ask herself whether it

would have been so very shocking if she had said "yes" to his last request. After all, he was her cousin, and up to the last year or so, had certainly kissed her as often as he felt disposed, without either of them thinking anything at all of the matter. Of course that was before he had begun to "talk nonsense," since which epoch they had both of them thought a great deal of it ; and on the whole, Lena came to the conclusion that she had done right. A caress so asked for and so given could not, she thought, have been any great consolation to him, while it might afterwards have become a matter of serious remorse to her.

"Frank has gone, papa dear," she said lightly, the moment she passed out of the sweet twilight into the more garish atmosphere of gas and broadcloth and meaningless murmur from which her rejected suitor had shrunk ; "and if you want me to play anything, I will," she added in a whisper, bending down, with a grace that seemed natural to



her, over the shrunken little frame and care-worn forehead that could never have been the least like her own.

He was not much over forty, this father of hers, and yet his hair was whitening fast, and had left sundry bumpy protuberances on his head bare already, as if the rest of his head had been of a softer grain than the rest, and had been washed away like sandstone, by the buffetings of the sea of troubles which had beaten round it. What there was left of him all looked worn and timid, too, and so fragile that one almost wondered how he had reached the arm-chair to which he was helplessly clinging in safety, much more how he had passed through the more serious dangers of even forty years.

He looked up with a weary, half-scared expression into the face of the graceful young beauty who was bending over him, which softened into inexpressible fondness and admiration as he answered :

“Yes, yes, my dear,” he said nervously.

"Ask your—your mother. I am sure she will be pleased."

Without deeming, apparently, that this additional formality was necessary, the girl passed on to the pianoforte, and opening it quietly for herself, sat down as if alone, and broke into grand massive chords which led into the harmonious majesty of Beethoven. There were voices in the room as she began, but the mighty music went on, in disregard of such feeble competition, until they were all stilled, and all eyes were turned towards the lithe, childish hands that were calling it into life with such unerring strength and accuracy of touch.

She rose quietly when the last movement of the sonata was concluded, seeming to ignore the thanks of her audience, though not scanty, almost as completely as she had done their presence while at the instrument. One voice, so peculiarly clear and devoid of feeling that it made itself conspicuous above the general murmur of congratulation, came

so unmistakably to her ears that she was, in a sense, compelled to turn and acknowledge it.

There were not more than half-a-dozen people besides Mr. and Mrs. Morden in the room, and Rothery Selfert had a voice and a face that would have been conspicuous enough even amongst a far larger number. They had lost the freshness of youth certainly, for he was at least as old a man as her father, though cast in a very different mould. The face was perhaps hard, and a little worn, bearing on it evident traces of time, which thick dark whiskers, just shot with grey, made no attempt to conceal, but there was an attractive look of power and energy there which had been rather developed than diminished by time, and, if the storms of wind and weather had washed away any of *his* head, they had certainly left it in the most symmetrical form possible. Perhaps the real feature which stamped his countenance with so much force and character was his forehead, which stood out smooth and massive

above the dark grey eyes, as if the very pride of intellect was enthroned behind it, and few women could look on Rothery Selfert's face without that instinctive sense of intellectual inferiority which is, perhaps, as likely to attract a woman's mind towards its object as any other impression which a woman's mind is prone to receive.

Lena Morden's eyes, at any rate, wandered furtively more than once during the remainder of the evening towards the face of this particular listener, and her ears were always open when he spoke, which he did often, with a voice which, as has been said, insisted upon making itself heard, and generally quite justified the assumption which an invidious critic might have detected in it. Lena Morden, however, was certainly not invidious, and hardly critical, though she had not refrained from criticising the language and aspirations of her over-ambitious boy-lover that evening with very unpalatable severity. But then the two men seemed to her so

different! The one only appeared different to herself, because she had been all her life accustomed to regard him as something that would be a man some day. The other—well, of him she had not been accustomed to think at all, nor indeed had she been accustomed to think of any one the least like him; but it was just this very sense of novelty which prevented her from detecting anything in his voice or his manner which could jar upon her feelings. She knew, of course, that he was much older than her cousin Frank, but she did not believe that even when the problematic day, when the latter was to become “a man,” had arrived, he could ever impress her as something stronger, wiser, less amenable to pain and sorrow than herself, as this older and sterner specimen of humanity had done at once.

If Mr. Selfert had even been twenty years younger than he was, she thought that the respect with which he inspired her would scarcely have been diminished. Yet she

wondered, as he shook hands with her when he said good-night, whether he had ever been as weak and foolish twenty years ago as Frank had been that night in the garden, and she thought it unlikely that all men had to wait until they had reached the further side of forty before they are able to inspire fear or respect in a woman's mind.

Lena Morden had nothing to say that evening to the lady who filled, with the majestic and self-satisfied grace of maturity, the place of the girl's dead mother; but she went to her father's dressing-room when their guests were gone, and that footsore wayfarer on life's dusty road had retired for one of the few solitary hours in which he was allowed to indulge; and knocking softly, went in with the assured step that demands a welcome. She was quite accustomed to her father's society in these his moments of relaxation, and it brought no smile to her face to see that he had cast aside the black garment in which he had been pilloried all the evening, and

was sitting with his back to the door, feebly caressing the more doubtful parts of his head with a hair-brush, as if to comfort himself with the assurance that all was not bald and barren yet.

Going gently behind him, she took both his hands in her own firm, soft palms, and bending down over him as she had done when she came in from the garden in the evening, just touched his forehead with her lips, very much as if she was caressing a child.

"Have you come to say good-night, my dear?" he asked, submitting patiently as she took the brushes from his hand, and turned him round in his chair so that she could look into his face.

"Yes, and I have had such a wretched evening!" the girl answered with energy, though not at all in a grumbling tone, for it had never occurred to her that her father was responsible for anything which caused her vexation, or could be called upon to set it

right. "So have you, I'm afraid, haven't you?"

"I hope your—your mother hasn't been saying anything trying, you know, my dear," hazarded the author of her being in a timid voice, and ignoring the suggestion as to his own discomfort altogether.

"Mrs. Morden!" said Lena scornfully. "Oh no, nothing out of the common. It's something worse than Mrs. Morden this time. It's my cousin Frank."

"Oh!" said Mr. Morden, looking a good deal relieved at hearing there was anything worse than Mrs. Morden. "Yes, of course—your cousin Frank. I suppose he wants you to say you'll marry him, isn't that it?"

"I don't know why you should guess that as such a likely thing to have happened," said Lena, pulling her father out of his chair, and seating herself in it, "but that's exactly it. At his age! I think he was quite childish to-night, do you know!"

"Well," said the victim of the ejection



pensively, trying to sit upon the end of a portmanteau, which immediately gave way with him, and nearly brought him into an extremely undignified position, "you know he's nearly two years older than you, my dear, and I'm sure he doesn't think you childish. I don't see why you shouldn't marry him some day, when you both know your own minds a little better."

"I think *you* are getting childish now," said the girl, with a magnificent assumption of superiority over the male sex generally. "Why, he would be always asking my advice! How would you like a husband who could do nothing better than that, if you were a woman, I should like to know!"

Whatever such a propensity might be in a husband, Mr. Morden felt that he could imagine greater faults in a wife, and perhaps his daughter guessed what his thoughts might be, for she went on without waiting for an answer.

"He was so unreasonable, papa, and lost

his temper, and went away without being commonly civil. Do you think it would be nice to marry a man who could make such an exhibition of himself as that? About nothing, too!"

"Nothing, my dear?" said her father interrogatively, trying to get the portmanteau into an efficient condition again.

"Oh, you know what I mean," she answered impatiently. "Don't let us talk about it any more. Only I was obliged to tell somebody, you know."

Somebody looked quite incapable of affording any assistance, and rather relieved to find that the subject was not to be pursued. He had by this time succeeded in balancing himself upon the end of the upright portmanteau, but was nearly shaken off his perch again by the suddenness with which his daughter started an entirely new subject.

"What sort of man is Mr. Selfert, papa?"

"Rothery Selfert, my dear? Well—he is

Mrs. Morden's brother, you know. He has only been here twice before."

"I know that," said Lena petulantly, "but I want to know what sort of man he is. Anybody might be Mrs. Morden's brother. Is he clever, I mean, or only bad-tempered?"

"I beg your pardon, my dear," said her father humbly. "People say he is very clever, and I dare say he is. I know he makes a great deal of money. He is a barrister, you know, and a Q.C., and all that sort of thing; and, as I was saying just now, he is Mrs. Morden's brother. I don't think I can tell you anything more about him."

The shadow of Mrs. Morden had by this time so completely fallen over Mrs. Morden's husband that his daughter forbore from asking him whether all Mrs. Morden's relations had their personal identity so completely merged in that proprietorship as the speaker appeared to think the subject of their conversation had, perhaps from a consciousness

of his own position. Instead of doing so, she kissed him again on the knobbyest portion of his head, and said good-night. He looked wistfully after her as she shut the door, and then sank helplessly back into the shadow of the matrimonial wing which was falling upon him for the night.

## CHAPTER II.

ROTHERY SELFERT was, as Mr. Morden had said, making a lot of money. Judged by that not always infallible test, and judged by others of greater severity, he was, as people were said by Mr. Morden to say, a clever man. Whether or not he was also a happy man, and why, it will be the object of these pages in some measure to show.

Twenty years ago, when Rothery Selfert had begun his profession, and joined the circuit upon which he was now as well-known as any member of the circuit mess, his aspirations were perhaps easier to understand, and more likely to be gratified. In so far, at any rate, as they were bounded by mere ambition

of professional success, they had not been, for a man of his intellectual powers, unreasonable; and at the time at which this history begins, they had been satisfied to the full. Yet, as this history commences when Rothery Selfert was a man of forty-five, it is obvious that some chapters of his life, and those not the least interesting, must remain unread. What those chapters had been was known to Rothery Selfert himself, and to very few people besides. For he had been throughout his life essentially a reserved and self-contained man, and such hopes and desires as he had cherished, either in or out of his professional career, he had kept to himself. There was a grave in a little country churchyard where some of them, at least, lay buried; but no one knew it, and the girl whose love had been nearly dear enough to him to draw him out of the dusty struggle, to which he was committed, into a more peaceful and ignoble obscurity, was little more to him now than the fading image of something in the

imaginary past, long since beyond his power or will to grasp.

He had not been a popular man, either, lacking always that genial buoyancy of spirits, and happy sympathy with those around him, which men in other respects inferior so often enjoy, and for the want of which there are so few gifts which can compensate. Throughout his life his back had been stiff, and his manner unyielding, and he had even seemed to find a pleasure in the petty disputes and antipathies which are perhaps inseparable from the life of a barrister on a large circuit. The wine committee of the circuit mess knew him as a stern and always troublesome critic, and he had ever been foremost in dragging before that rigid though voluntary tribunal the most trifling transgression of its etiquette, dealing with the offender, in manner at least, as if he had been a personal enemy of his own. Perhaps personal enemies were not likely to be altogether avoided in such a life as this; at any rate, it may safely

be said that Rothery Selfert made but few personal friends, and did not seem much concerned by the knowledge that such was the case. Yet, unpopular though he may have been, he was, and had always been, universally respected, and almost feared. He had not written a book, nor married into a good legal connection, nor had a miracle been wrought in his favour—the three roads popularly said to be the chief if not the only avenues to success in his profession—but nevertheless he had succeeded, and that without any undue delay. Whatever might be said of his social demerits, he had when actually engaged in professional work almost every attribute which could win an attorney's heart; and by sheer force of such gifts he had forced his way to the front rank of his profession, holding his place there so unmistakably that none, either among his seniors or juniors, were found to grumble when he took his silk gown, and with it the lion's share of the most lucrative business on his circuit.



From forty to fifty is said to be the age at which a man, if ever, gives himself up unreservedly to ambition ; and Rothery Selfert, being then still unmarried, may be supposed to have had abundance of energy to spare for such considerations. To all appearance he was quite alive to them, and having recently stood with success for a small borough which still defied the reforming spirit of the age, may be considered to have had a widening prospect of professional advancement opening before him. As yet, however, he had made no mark in the House, while men were even beginning to whisper that his wonderful success was not likely to travel from the courts at Westminster to the higher region upstairs, and that he was but a mere *nisi prius* advocate after all. Such ill-natured whispers, however, were nothing more than what must be expected by every man who climbs to any eminence at all above those who have been his equals, and Rothery Selfert was certainly not the man to show that they

had in any way reached his ears. The position of a mere *nisi prius* advocate may not be a very lofty one, but it is at any rate high enough, when secure, for a man who has attained it to look down with tolerable equanimity at those who would sneer at his success.

Mr. Morden had been able to tell his daughter hardly anything of Rothery Selfert beyond what has been expanded here, except that he was Mrs. Morden's brother. Some knowledge of Mrs. Morden is necessary to explain fully the advantages and disadvantages of such a relationship, and happily Mrs. Morden was not so difficult to understand as her brother.

Enough has already been said to make it clear that this lady was not Mr. Morden's first wife, but it will not be so easy a task to explain why she became his second. Certainly, if Lena Morden's wishes on the matter had been consulted, she would not have attained that position; but Mr. Morden's daughter (and natural protectress) was away

from his side on a prolonged visit when that timid victim of the practised trapper first placed his foot on the matrimonial snare. The jaws of the gin, artfully concealed by the dry leaves of the past which had been spread over them, closed with a snap upon the unsuspecting prey, and from that time until the present Mr. Morden had been held by the leg. There was no possibility of escaping from the fatal grip, even if it had been practicable to sacrifice a limb, and, like a snared rabbit, Mr. Morden knew that he would have to wait until death released him from its hold. No wonder that, in this unpleasant predicament, Mr. Morden sometimes felt that the iron was eating into his soul.

The lady who had baited and set this successful trap was not inexperienced in such ventures, having before this time seen her rabbit taken away by the grim gamekeeper by whose hands Mr. Morden's release was one day to be given to him. She was a masculine lady of a certain age, not unlike

her brother in her apparent disregard of the feelings of rabbits and the world around her generally, but her outward appearance was somewhat softer and fuller in its outlines, as befitted her gentler sex; and despite the suspicion of a moustache which gave a certain degree of decision to her upper-lip, her countenance was by no means uncomely or devoid of attraction in the eyes of men with a thoroughly matured taste.

Mr. Morden's taste was thoroughly matured, but it cannot be said that either the moustache or the other somewhat abundant charms of his captruss had exercised much attraction over his mind as he approached the snare. Probably by this time he had forgotten that they existed, if, indeed, he had ever known it, but he was quite conscious of the existence of a great many other things, for which he had certainly never looked. He was an essentially domestic man, with such a weak and clinging nature that he had found it absolutely impossible to face the remainder

of his existence without something like the companionship to which, until the last three years of his life, he had been accustomed; but he had not bargained for exactly the sort of companionship with which the new Mrs. Morden provided him, nor indeed for quite so much of it. That the new Mrs. Morden should like her own way was no doubt natural, but he did think that she might have occasionally relaxed the tightness of the grip with which the jaws of the matrimonial gin were eating into his leg.

Although Rothery Selfert was not a man given to society, unless it was society of a nature likely to contribute towards the worldly success on which he set such store, he had generally been in the habit of acceding to his sister's requests, with a sort of cold-blooded substitute for affection which he had learned to consider as inseparable from fraternal duty. Consequently, he had come to set the seal of his own exceeding respectability on the new connection she had formed,

and Mrs. Morden had that evening been displaying her timid little captive with much pride for his inspection. The captive had certainly not borne the inspection gracefully, but then it is so difficult, under the most favourable circumstances, to be graceful in such a position! Wherever the introduction to any of his wife's family is postponed until after marriage, the bridegroom will have more or less a difficult part to play. It is so hard to impress such critical spectators with the double idea that he thinks himself scarcely worthy of his good fortune, and that he is, in reality, eminently so! It is hard to look as if he was not criticising them; it is harder still to look as if he was not being criticised himself!

Such social gymnastics are certainly not assisted by that sense of constraint about the leg under which Mr. Morden was suffering, and it cannot be said that he showed complete proficiency in the part he was expected to play. He was conscious, moreover, that

his shortcomings had not passed wholly unnoticed, and it was not without trepidation that he quitted the sanctuary of his dressing-room that night, and prepared himself for the slight corrective stimulant which matrimony had rendered inseparable from the hours of rest.

“Mr. Morden,” said the inexorable voice which had been so strange, so utterly unknown to him a year ago—“Mr. Morden, it is strange to me that you find it impossible to show a little more cordiality towards my relations.”

“My dear,” replied the submissive victim, making a feeble “offer” at the light, as though he would fain extinguish it, and seek some shelter beneath the protecting veil of darkness, “I—I did my best.”

“Leave the candle, if you please, Mr. Morden, for a minute. Your best! Do you usually do ‘your best’ with your head half out of the window, and your legs sprawling among your guests—like—like centipedes?”

Mr. Morden was too cowed to remind the voice that centipedes were not generally enveloped in black cloth tubing, tipped with black sealing-wax, feeling that, however erroneous Mrs. Morden's views on entomology might be, the present was hardly the time to correct it. Indeed, if he had never anything worse to listen to than hearing his limbs compared to "hundred-legs," he felt that he could have faced the remainder of his existence with tolerable equanimity. The lady, indeed, did not wait for her comparison to be criticised.

"Of course, Mr. Morden, if you are ashamed of your face, or if you are ashamed of me, I can understand your conduct. But even then, I could wish that you would pay sufficient regard to society to place your legs in a more respectable position in my drawing-room. You must have had plenty of other opportunities of—sprawling."

The wretched man felt as if he would never have sufficient energy to "sprawl"



again, but could hardly attempt to conciliate his censor by promising to be more careful of the manner in which his legs were disposed for the future. So he again feebly remarked that "he was very sorry," and looked vacantly round the room as if looking for a safe place, out of the reach of Mrs. Morden's observation, in which to deposit them for the night.

"My brother Rothery," continued the sepulchral voice, having apparently exhausted the subject of centipedes, "is anxious, if possible, to be of service to—to my husband's family. He was good enough to take some interest in the future of your daughter, and to ask what facilities she had for entering into society. It would have been painful to me in the extreme to explain that the utter want of sympathy between your daughter and myself rendered it impossible for me to enter into her feelings and wishes on the subject, and I was obliged to refer him to you. At that very moment,"

continued Mrs. Morden severely, "your head was out of the window, and your boots came in contact with Mrs. Prinsep's dress."

"My dear, I am very sorry," repeated Mr. Morden for the third time, in a tone which a very humble kitchen-maid might have used to a cook. "If you have no further occasion for—for the candle, my dear, I think I will go to bed."

Mr. Morden was this time successful in his attempt to extinguish the light, and lay down to rest, trying to imagine what sort of future awaited him, if his wife was to be assisted by Mr. Selfert in discharging the domestic responsibilities she had assumed when she undertook the reformation of his household.

### CHAPTER III.

FRANK MORDEN heard his cousin's "good-night" clearly enough, but never turned his head, as he set off to walk his anger cool that hot June night. Like all roads near London at that time of the year, the ground beneath his feet was hot and dusty, though it passed between cool green gardens, rich with the scent of limes and horse-chestnuts, just like the one he had quitted the moment before. He had not stopped to get his hat, and his shoes were soon half-full of soft powdery gravel, but his mind was too crowded with what he deemed his wrongs to allow him to notice such discomforts as these. Of course it is not every man, who

fails in persuading some particular woman of his own exceeding merit, that has the right to grumble at his want of success, and it is only at one epoch of his life that a man is likely very seriously to do so ; but Frank Morden was just at that critical age which expects to be taken by everybody at its own valuation, and looks upon any attempt on the part of outsiders to form an original opinion as a personal affront. It may be added, in further excuse for his ebullition of temper, that Frank Morden was, and always had been, quite incapable of understanding his cousin Lena. To him she was only a tall slight girl with glorious grey eyes, and a clear soft complexion that glowed and paled with every passing emotion. He knew she had a sweet voice, that somehow or other always appeared to him a little deficient in tenderness when it addressed him, and a clear well-cut mouth, that it seemed to him almost sacrilege to wish to kiss, but yet which he could not look at without longing

to do so. Such a privilege would, he knew, be some man's at some future day, and he did not quite see why it should not be his. He really knew or understood very little more about her, and yet he had never been able to get rid of a feeling that he was not likely ever to be fortunate enough to call all these charms his own. He could not imagine a time at which the idea of sacrilege, just mentioned, would entirely cease from troubling his mind, and had always had a consciousness that the reverence he felt for her had no counterpart in her thoughts, and ought not, in a properly assorted couple, to be all on one side. Nevertheless, as has been said, he was very angry as he went tramping bare-headed along the dusty road, and the sense of his disappointment rankled as keenly in his breast as if he had never anticipated it as a possible calamity.

Perhaps what really stung his temper most was the thought that he had really had no rival to contend with. He did not believe

that any other man had ever even spoken to Lena Morden of love, as he had done, and he was quite sure that none had, at any rate, enjoyed the advantages for discussing such a subject that had been his. There was a certain modesty about his youth, or at all events he fancied for the moment that there was, which would almost have prevented him from entering the lists for such a prize, had there been any competitor whose claims he might, without loss of self-respect, believe superior to his own ; but how ignominious it was to fail for no other reason than his own incapability ! He had always distrusted himself a little, after the fashion of his age, but had never realised before that night how poor and weak a creature he must really be ! If he had failed here, with such a motive and such a hope to spur him on, was it likely that he would ever succeed in attaining any object that was worth an effort ?

He was not vicious by nature, and believed that up to the present time he had shown

tolerable steadiness and self-denial in keeping straight, where he saw so many of his daily companions go wrong ; but he began to-night to wonder whether, after all, the right way to live was not to grasp at as much of what seemed like pleasure as came in his way, and take the chance of such thorns and nettles as might be scattered among the flowers. Whether or not it is a salutary thing, as some men will say, for a boy to be baulked in his first love, it is certain that Frank Morden that night found the draught at any rate a bitter one.

The taste had lost none of its bitterness an hour or two afterwards, when he got back to the little station from which he had to take the train back to town, and found one of his fellow-guests of that evening waiting on the platform. Even though it may be an uncomfortable thing to make your way home by railway from a suburban dinner-party, yet on a midsummer night, when the guest has a cigar in his mouth, and is satisfied with the

claret his host has provided for him, even the anticipation of twenty minutes in a first-class smoking-carriage is not sufficient to take all appearance of prosperity and content from the outward man. At any rate, Rothery Selfert looked prosperous and contented enough to jar horribly upon the lad's sense of his own misfortunes, and might, for anything that marred the peace of his impassive countenance, have never had a disappointment, or a wish ungratified, since he was promoted from a more juvenile costume into knickerbockers and tunics.

He looked a little curiously at the lad, who had been sitting opposite him that evening at dinner, and almost took the trouble to wonder at his flushed face and bare head. Something in his look, perhaps the utter composure which was such a contrast to his own, seemed to irritate Frank Morden nearly beyond endurance, and he forced himself to speak in order to destroy the charm which he felt growing upon him.



"I went out to have a cigar," he said bluntly, "and dropped my hat over the bridge."

It must be admitted that he did not tell his little gratuitous story well, and his hearer smiled a little inwardly as he tried to remember the name of the excitable young gentleman who was taking the trouble to apologise for his appearance.

Just then the train came up, and they got in together. Before they got to London the elder man remembered that he had seen the excitable young gentleman in question pass into the garden with Mrs. Morden's new step-daughter, the girl with the big grey eyes, in whom, as Mrs. Morden had rightly said, he had been good enough to take some interest; and he thought it worth his while to ask the excitable young gentleman, who certainly looked as if he had lost something else besides his hat, whether he was not some connection of the family.

"Yes," said the lad brusquely, "she is my cousin."

"Mrs. Morden, do you mean?" inquired the other, again with that slight inward smile which he hardly took so much trouble this time to conceal.

Frank blushed with vexation at his own *gaucherie*.

"No," he said with a little awkwardness; "Mr. Morden is my uncle. My name is Morden, you know."

"Yes?" said the elder man equably, knowing that it was not necessary at all to tell his own name.

Mr. Morden's family, who had been privileged by becoming matrimonially connected with the sister of Rothery Selfert, Esq., Q.C., M.P., could hardly want instruction as to the outward appearance of the source of so much dignity and honour. So he lighted another cigar without saying more, and sat watching his companion with a calm look of superiority in his face that was expressive enough in itself.

The lad sat under it, inwardly chafing for

a few minutes, and then turned impatiently to his elder companion, with a flushed and almost defiant face.

"You are Mr. Selfert, I think," he said abruptly; "Mrs. Morden's brother?"

Mrs. Morden's brother intimated, by a placid motion of his head, that Mrs. Morden, and through her the rest of the Morden family, had the honour of that relationship.

"I don't know if you know," pursued the lad, putting his hand to his heated forehead as he spoke, and feeling a little disconcerted by being thereby reminded that his head was bare; "I don't know if you know," he repeated with the same awkwardness of expression "that Mrs. Morden and—my cousin—are not getting on very well together?"

Rothery Selfert, always with that same irritating inward smile, replied condescendingly:

"Need we enter into that?"

"*I* need," said Frank Morden, fretting under the other's manner, "because she is my

cousin, you know. I said that before. And I want to know if you don't think some consideration is due to a girl like that, who is put into the background, and made wretched, simply because her father has chosen a— a lady—to fill her mother's place? Of course I can't speak to her, but I think you ought to concern yourself in the matter."

"I suppose you have been commissioned to make this complaint to me?" said Mr. Selfert, as if that was a matter of course, but knowing perfectly well that such was not the case.

The lad looked again a little disconcerted, but did not like to fall back upon his previous assertion that "she was his cousin," and said nothing.

"I see that it is not so," continued the elder man in the same equable voice, "and that you have been—a little injudicious. You must not appoint yourself other people's champion like that. Of course you have no right to criticise Mrs. Morden's conduct at

all, and you certainly cannot know very well what may pass in a house to which you do not belong — unless you are speaking the words of somebody else, which I am sure is not the case. If you had been an older man, I should have told you that your language had been nothing less than impertinent. As it is——”

Rothery Selfert, Q.C., relapsed into silence, as if he really did not know what a man who was *not* an older man ought to be told, and just then the train stopped at the platform. The lad jumped out, but fired a parting shot before he went.

“You seem to think,” he said, with an imitation, that was almost ridiculous, of his antagonist’s calm deliberate manner, “that it is impossible for a man to be impertinent to anybody except his elders. I think I spoke to you in a manner that deserved a more civil answer than you have chosen to give me.”

Rothery Selfert got into a cab, and lit

another cigar, but as he drove to his rooms in Mount Street it did occur to him once or twice to wonder what his injudicious young friend and Lena Morden had found to say to each other that night in the garden.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE leisure-time of Rothery Selfert, Q.C., during the next two or three days, was hardly sufficient for the solution of the question which was mentioned as troubling his mind at the end of the previous chapter. He was busily engaged from ten to four just then in endeavouring to persuade a very innocently-minded special jury, under the protection for the time being of the weakest judge on the bench, that the lord of a very ill-defined manor or reputed manor in Yorkshire, notwithstanding a reservation in a conveyance from the bishop of the diocese in 1572, retained the exclusive right to the minerals under certain waste land comprised in that

conveyance. The minerals in question had been entirely exhausted for at least a hundred years, which rendered the evidence of the score or so of aged witnesses who were brought up from Yorkshire for the purpose rather less conclusive than it otherwise would have been on the subject; but it was nevertheless a question of the last importance to the parties concerned, and one that called urgently for a definite solution one way or the other. A compromise was nearly effected at the end of the second day, but eventually came to nothing, owing to the peculiar character of the litigants on either side.

The lord of the manor (or reputed manor) felt that his ancestral dignity was nearly concerned, and made it a *sine qua non* that certain excavations in the West Moor, made so long ago as 1799 by the lessees of the then bishop, should be filled up, and the ground restored to its pristine condition. The bishop reflected that he was a corporation sole, having (*qua* bishop) neither body



to be kicked nor soul to be d——d, and felt it his duty, in the interests of his possible successors and of the church at large, to resist the encroachments of the laity in a matter so fraught with peril to the safety of the establishment. Consequently, it was necessary that the rights and extent of the manor (or reputed manor) in question should be pronounced upon by a jury, and two more days were necessarily consumed, and another batch of aged witnesses sent for from Yorkshire, before the matter could be laid before them with sufficient clearness to enable them definitely and finally to disagree. It will easily be understood that this desirable consummation was not reached without the consumption of a good deal of Rothery Selfert's time and energies in the matter.

To the intelligent reader, who has already recognised by internal evidence the particular session in which these events took place, it is hardly necessary to add that the demands made by the House upon the time of

Rothery Selfert, Esq., Q.C., M.P., after his dinner were even more urgent than those occupations the nature of which has been already detailed. As everybody knows, the Bill for the better Regulation of the Qualification of Juries in England and Wales had just been introduced by a perfectly intractable member of the most factious Opposition of the century, and was supported by the whole strength of that party, in direct violation of a tacit pledge, given by a gentleman, who was understood to be acting as its Leader, on an occasion which his adherents contended could hardly be described as even semi-official. Whether a tacit pledge, given by a politician about whose functions there seemed to be considerable doubt, on an occasion as to which there was even more dispute, was in any sense binding upon those who loudly professed their anxiety to follow the lead of the right man, in the right place, and at the right time, was a moot-point which was just then exercising the minds of

the more timid politicians on both sides of the House. But certain provisions had been artfully introduced into this Juries' Bill, which would (the Government declared) seriously affect the whole fabric of the constitution. The result, if the Bill was passed, would be to subvert entirely the order of precedence at present obtaining between the Chancery and Common Law Judges, while at the same time it equalised (and reduced) the annual salaries of their chief clerks. There was a minor provision to regulate the sale and distribution of land on an intestacy, which the intractable member incidentally mentioned would result in the re-establishment of a yeoman class on their native soil, but it was generally understood that this clause would not be pressed in Committee, if the Bill ever got so far, and the other objects aimed at were of sufficient importance and sanctity in themselves, for the Government to use all its influence and energy in preventing the obnoxious measure from ever

reaching that stage. The Attorney-general had on a previous occasion rather committed himself on the subject of Juries generally, and it was understood that the Solicitor-general was to become Master of the Rolls as soon as the present aged possessor of that title was removed from his office by old age; so that it was absolutely necessary to find an honourable and learned member free from the suspicion of bias or prejudice in the matter to support the Government views; and it was already known that Rothery Selfert, Q.C., would close the debate on the second reading by urging the rejection of the Bill. In the midst of such varied and distracting anxieties, it is hardly to be wondered at, as has been already said, if the words of the hatless young gentleman he had rebuked in the railway carriage were not constantly present to Rothery Selfert's mind.

On the day, however, when it was finally decided that the dispute as to the minerals

under the manor (or reputed manor) must be begun all over again, the barrister found that notwithstanding his multifarious duties, he had the evening to do pretty well what he liked with. Notice had been given in the House that a subordinate member of the Government would be asked whether he had not publicly stated it to be his opinion that the refusal of the Committee of the Stock Exchange to grant a quotation to a project for a railway in the Republic of Lima was calculated to complicate the relations of her Majesty's Government with that power ; but it was not thought absolutely necessary that the champion who had been selected to demolish the Juries' Qualification Bill should be present on the occasion. Mr. Selfert had leisure, therefore, to turn his attention to the domestic difficulties which had been brought under his notice on the evening that he had inspected the new arrangements made by Mrs. Morden for her future comfort, and decided upon going down to offer himself as

a kind of skilled referee in the matter. But he was so much more accustomed to hold his arbitrations in his own chambers at the Temple, under the immediate supervision of his clerk, that he had some difficulty in repressing a consciousness that he was acting almost irregularly in the matter, by defrauding that inflexible guardian of his professional honour of his due share of the fees.

The door of the house which led into the garden was open, but Rothery Selfert was a man who always felt a sort of awkward difficulty in entering a room without being announced ; the more punctiliously and unmistakably the better ; and he impressed this fact upon the open door and the bell-handle with as much emphasis as possible, feeling as if he was paying a refined and dignified compliment to Mrs. Morden no less than to Mrs. Morden's brother by so doing. He had been wondering vaguely as he walked from the station whether he should see the young

gentleman who had, so to speak, delivered him his brief in the reference, and was conscious that he should not be altogether dissatisfied if such were to be the case, as his dignity was rather improved, in his own opinion, by such contrasts. But he did not see the young gentleman lurking anywhere about, and came to the conclusion that on this occasion his dignity would have to stand alone.

The two figures in the drawing-room were still and orderly enough when he entered to satisfy the most exigent demands of society, which objects to emotion on principle, and holds that the gusts of human passion should be allowed to sweep over its lowest strata alone. Nevertheless, there was an undefinable sensation in the air that is not generally associated with calm settled weather, and Rothery Selfert almost felt that, like Elijah of old, he could hear a "sound of abundance of rain." There were drops, at any rate, he could almost have sworn, in the big grey

eyes, and the clear complexion was a shade more flushed than he had seen it two or three evenings before; while Mrs. Morden welcomed him with a voice that sounded as if it had been a little relaxed by the oppression of the moral atmosphere, and had lost something of its purity of tone in consequence.

"I told you, Rothery," said Mrs. Morden, in a tone which seemed rather to pride itself upon jarring in its hearer's ears than otherwise, "that there was no sympathy between—Mr. Morden's daughter—and myself. I am hardly sorry that you have come at a moment when it would be impossible to conceal the fact even from a stranger."

Yet it did not look difficult to sympathise with Mr. Morden's daughter, as she stood in the window recess, with her graceful young head half-averted from her step-mother, and the lashes drooping on her soft cheek, as if they would fain hide from the grey eyes all that could leave a profane or vulgar image



on the pure mirrors within. A less exacting critic than Mrs. Morden might have easily fancied that the honour so recently done to Mr. Morden's family was not fully appreciated by at least this one member of it.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Selfert, with less than his usual fluency, and feeling that it would not be easy to give all the fraternal support that was expected from him—"I am sorry that it should be so difficult for two who are so closely connected to sympathise with each other. I am sure that Miss Morden regrets the difficulty of which you complain quite as earnestly as you yourself, Catherine, can do."

The words and phrasing were stilted and formal, but they hardly sounded so in the girl's ears. Of course it was not the kind of thing that her cousin Frank would have said, but she did not expect men like Mr. Selfert to talk like her cousin Frank. Had she not told the latter that he spoke like a child? Here was a man who, at any rate, had put

away childish things, and yet, as she felt intuitively, was endeavouring to say that which should not be displeasing for her to listen to. She would not pretend to look as if she really desired that sympathy between Mrs. Morden and herself of which the former spoke, but Rothery Selfert thought he could detect a willingness to accept another sort of sympathy in the grey eyes which looked up to thank him.

“I should be glad to satisfy myself of that,” said Mrs. Morden in her iciest tone; and certainly the amount of ice which must have been necessary to produce the resulting degree of chill was quite calculated to freeze into torpor any tendency to natural affection with which it might have come in contact. “Perhaps Mr. Morden’s daughter may feel disposed to tell you whether she is willing to apologise to me for the language she used a few minutes before you came in. Unless she can overcome her pride so far as to do so, it is impossible that we

can continue members of the same household."

Rothery Selfert felt, almost for the first time, some slight distrust of his own powers of persuasion, as the refrigerator in which the above dignified *ultimatum* had been iced conveyed itself smoothly, as if running on castors, out of the room. What he might be called upon to do, if the pride of which the chilly voice had spoken proved too much for Miss Morden to overcome, he did not quite know; but he was conscious that a certain effect of disappointment would be produced in his own mind, if it so far succumbed as to produce the apology which was so much desired by the elder lady. Especially as he had still a lingering sort of feeling that the elder lady, by virtue of her relationship, was almost to be regarded as his client in the matter.

The graceful head was still half-averted from the rest of the room; and the grey eyes so persistently refused to give his own another opportunity of meeting them, that Mr. Selfert

was compelled at last to "open the case" for himself. With some lameness and hesitation, it must be confessed; and yet on the question of the reservation of minerals in the Bishop's lease, he had been almost fluent!

"You will forgive me for saying again, Miss Morden, that I regret very much the difference which has so unhappily arisen between my sister and yourself?"

"Between—?" said Lena hesitatingly, as if she did not quite understand him.

"Between my sister—Mrs. Morden—and yourself. I regret it the more, because I am conscious that, in many respects, she—my sister—is not an easy person to live with."

There had been days, indeed, when the lady who was now afflicting the soul of Mr. Morden had done battle with the more stubborn spirit of her brother; and though she had been compelled to retire ignominiously worsted from the fray, yet in the soul of her conqueror there yet lived a lively recollection of the ardour with which the struggle had

been carried on. The girl simply inclined her head, still not quite understanding whether she was to look upon Mrs. Morden's brother as a friend or a foe; though, as has been already said, the formal style in which he spoke was not altogether displeasing to her. It did not seem possible that such a tone could ever become dissonant with passion, or allow itself to utter anything which could sound unseemly in a lady's ears; which was more, at any rate, than could with truth be said of the voice which had just been conveyed, refrigerator and all, out of the room.

"I know that she is not disposed to admit that any of the fault can be on her side, in any case," continued Mr. Selfert, beginning to forget on which side his brief had been delivered to him in the matter; "but if you can put any trust in me, I will do my best to—to remove any of the difficulties which lie in the way of your happiness here. Perhaps you would like me to speak to Mr. Morden?"

“To papa?” said the girl, turning round, with a little contempt in her voice, as if at that she really found it necessary to try and persuade her adviser of the utter uselessness of the proceeding he proposed. “I think that would be quite useless, thank you, Mr. Selfert. And I am sorry to say he has quite enough to distress him already, without being made unhappy on my account.”

“Then I suppose there is nothing I can do for you,” said Rothery Selfert somewhat irresolutely, feeling that the Juries’ Bill would be easier to demolish than the measures his sister had introduced into the house of Morden.

“I have not asked that anything should be done,” said the victim of Mrs. Morden’s aptitude for reform, with something of that pride in her voice to which the ardent legislatrix so strongly objected. “It is Mrs. Morden, you know, who has thought it necessary to trouble you with this miserable business.”

Mr. Selfert repressed a strong inclination

to let her know that somebody else, the young gentleman without a hat to wit, had felt the same necessity, notwithstanding the curiosity he felt to see how she would take the information. She had turned her face more fully towards him now, and there was enough of the evening light left to show him as much of the bright grey eyes as their dark lashes were not too coy to hide. He wondered, not without a sort of half-developed idea that the thought was almost too trivial to be worthy of him, whether the light in them had been softer when the presumptuous young gentleman aforesaid had looked into them in the garden, a night or two back.

“I am sorry that Mrs. Morden has given me so ungracious a task,” said Rothery Selfert, steeling his breast, so far as its ordinary cuirass would fit, against such puerile fancies. “But since it has been imposed upon me, I hope that you will at least believe that I sincerely sympathise with the difficulties of your position.”

There must have been something in Lena Morden's eyes that suggested the idea of sympathy, for very few people saw much of them without that most desirable of all the forms of human charity immediately presenting itself to their minds.

When Frank Morden had talked about being as "happy as possible," he simply had the imaginary prospect before his eyes of being allowed one day to show a particular kind of sympathy for his cousin in as demonstrative a manner as he chose, and perhaps of receiving some in return. The same word had suggested itself to Mrs. Morden's lips, as a desirable sort of thing, if tempered with a little respect, to be looked for between Mr. Morden's daughter and Mr. Morden's wife. And here was Rothery Selfert, a man not too much given, undoubtedly, to sympathise with his fellow-creatures in general, solemnly tendering his own peculiar and refined sympathy, the very aroma of which was almost sufficient, in his opinion, for



his Christian charity to bestow upon ordinary deserving objects, for Miss Morden's acceptance !

Whether this last-mentioned sympathy resembled most closely, in its essential qualities, that coveted by the young lady's step-mother or by her cousin, was a problem which did not present itself to his mind for solution.

"Thank you," she said, looking up with eyes that were very innocent and child-like after all, when those puzzling lashes were not catching the rays that shot from them, and twisting them into a hundred incomprehensible combinations of light and colour. And she meant "thank you," too, for the provision made by nature for exciting sympathy for Lena Morden in minds like those of her cousin Frank and Rothery Selfert was by no means a purposeless arrangement. Lena Morden liked sympathy very much. "Indeed, if I thought I could do any good by talking to you of—my troubles, I would do so. But I am going away almost directly,

to stay in Devonshire, with one of my dearest friends, and I hope matters will have arranged themselves better by the time I come back. It is no good making oneself unhappy about the future, do you think it is?"

There was something almost childlike in the way the question was put, and Mr. Selfert smiled a little as he answered:

"Perhaps your future will arrange itself in the meantime, Miss Morden."

"How do you mean?" she asked quickly, not at all understanding his allusion.

"I only mean," he replied, feeling hot and uncomfortable at having to explain his meaning, as if he had been making a bad joke, "that you do not, of course, look forward to spending the whole of your life in your father's house, and that at your age, you cannot exactly foresee what may happen to change your situation entirely. For example" (he went on rather lamely, as if he had been interrupted by the Court while addressing the jury), "there is a cousin of

whom I have heard—indeed, I saw him here the other night—and it did not seem extravagant to suppose that he might be fortunate enough to be the means of giving you a home of your own. Or some one like him.”

The slight figure drew itself up with a magnificent expression of contempt.

“That is most improbable, Mr. Selfert,” she said coldly.

Indeed, the particular form of sympathy offered by her cousin Frank had been so entirely distasteful to her feelings, that she looked down with a splendid scorn upon the possibility of her ever accepting such a thing from any man, and almost wondered that Mr. Selfert had condescended to speak of such trivialities. She supposed that he was doing so under the idea that such a style of conversation was suitable to her sex and age, and felt anxious to justify herself in his eyes. Nothing could be more absurd than the idea that all women, simply because they were

young, had the visions of love and marriage constantly floating before their eyes.

“Well, well,” said Rothery Selfert, a good deal puzzled by her manner, and yet with a vague feeling of satisfaction that it appeared to promise so little for the success of her cousin’s suit, “that, of course, I can know nothing of. Only it will give me great pleasure to think that you will place sufficient confidence in my good-will to have recourse to me for advice, should any further trouble arise between you and Mrs. Morden, on that or any other subject. You will let me assure myself of this?”

“Certainly,” answered Lena Morden, hesitating a little as she accepted the entirely novel form of sympathy with which she was now being honoured, “as you are kind enough to interest yourself in my happiness.”

She did not at all understand the motives which could induce so great a man to profess an interest in it of so lively a nature, and was not a little flattered by the *empressement* of his

manner. Her experience of step-uncles, in which relation, if any, she supposed that Mr. Selfert stood to herself, was necessarily limited, and she had certainly not anticipated such a manifestation of what might be almost called affection from the referee Mrs. Morden had called in. If it was flattery, it was flattery of a very refined description, and she felt a certain amount of conscious pride in having attracted it. Nevertheless, Mr. Selfert's proffered protection was accepted in a very demure and quiet manner, and the eyelashes and cheeks conspired together to hide the grey eyes more closely than ever as she shook hands with Mrs. Morden's brother at his departure. Mrs. Morden's brother had some little difficulty in giving a satisfactory account of his interview to that lady, before he was allowed to return to town for the night. He could not exactly say that Miss Morden had expressed her willingness to make the apology which was so earnestly desired, but he had

satisfied himself that Miss Morden *did* (as he had begun by saying) regret the difficulty which had arisen quite as earnestly as "Catherine" herself could do, and ventured to remind "Catherine" that a little forbearance might be desirable on both sides. "Catherine" was very anxious that he should commit himself to a formal denunciation of the malignity and disrespect which had induced Mr. Morden's daughter to withhold her "sympathy" from her stepmother, but Mr. Selfert refused to enlarge upon this subject, and declared that he must dismiss the whole matter from his mind until after the Juries' Bill was disposed of. He understood that the difficulty was to be temporarily solved by Miss Morden's absenting herself from home; but in any event, his time and thoughts were so much taken up just now by his parliamentary duties — he had almost said his official duties — that, until the session was over, if it was absolutely necessary that he should consider the family embarrassments

of which "Catherine" spoke, that consideration must for the present be postponed. So Mr. Selfert returned to town; but as he had just got rid of the exception in the bishop's lease, and the right to the exhausted minerals, it is only reasonable to suppose that the mental space thus left unoccupied, or some of it, was taken up by the remembrance of his step-niece's pleading eyes, and of the inconsiderate haste with which he had taken her, eyes and all, under his protecting wing.

## CHAPTER V.

THERE are worse counties than Devonshire for a man to settle down in for the rest of his life, when he has come to that stage of it which calls most earnestly for the absolute tranquillity which domestic life offers to the would-be Benedict—when seen, at any rate, in perspective. And if such a man is contented with tranquillity and the other domestic joys which crowd themselves into the mental picture of such a state of existence, presenting to the enraptured view of the gazer into futurity almost as little individuality as a flock of sheep with their heads buried in clover—if, I say, he is satisfied with delights that offer that very limited



amount of variety or change, he might undoubtedly fix upon worse spots in that fair county than Lydcombe, or Lydcombe-cum-Saltham, as he would more strictly designate the parish, if his interest in it was clerical. The interest of the Reverend Albert Carfax in it was essentially clerical (as well as being domestic), and the full meaning of the more lengthy appellation had accordingly entered into his soul.

Of the Reverend Albert Carfax, and of the fortunate young lady who had already entered upon the task of providing those sheep-like joys which had been so attractive in anticipation, something in the nature of a portrait shall be given after the description of the parish in which the joys were being realised.

Lydcombe-cum-Saltham was one of those piebald monstrosities of a parish which are common enough on the sea-coast all round England. Lydcombe was the parish proper, and in Lydcombe was the parish church—

older, as a parish church ought to be, than anything within sight from its tower, but it was in Saltham that the bulk of the Rev. Albert Carfax's parishioners lived, and from Saltham the chief part of the congregation, even of the parish church, was drawn.

Saltham had, of course, a church, or rather a chapel-of-ease, to itself, where the Rev. Albert Carfax and his curate ministered alternately; and a very ostentatious, irrepressible chapel-of-ease it was, apt indeed, in the Saltham season, when the summer visitors were down and the bathing-machines out, to ignore the maternal functions of the mother church altogether. Yet Saltham was as ugly, as modern, and as artificial, as Lydcombe was old, picturesque, and Arcadian; and on the Sundays when it was his turn to take the more important duty there, the Rev. Albert Carfax felt almost as if his domestic joys were being vulgarised by their surroundings. It was a two-sided, vacillating sort of watering-place, set corner-wise

at the mouth of a tidal estuary, with one face looking blankly over an expanse of mud and sea-gulls, and one trying to redeem the character of the place by boldly confronting the breezy, open sea. Having a high, and to do it justice, a deserved reputation for salubrity, Saltham was densely populated by children in the summer, and by valetudinarians of both sexes above fifty (with a preponderance of old maids), in the winter ; so that it was an extremely lively and exhilarating place, and was fast rising (as the agent of the chief land-owner stated in his advertisements) to a perfectly giddy summit of prosperity.

But though Saltham, so far as the town itself went, might perhaps have been criticised unfavourably, it had certainly its compensating advantages. Chief among these was that it lay within easy reach of some of the loveliest scenery in Devonshire, where the cliffs that stretched from its seaward side, seamed and scarred all over with the

anger of many winters, broke suddenly into deep green "combes" that ran down to the very verge of the sea, with a tiny rivulet in the centre of each, lost and hidden under a mass of thicket and fern and meadow-sweet, and only betraying its cool presence beneath by the whisper of its mimic waterfalls, and the deeper green that was spread along its course. Still farther away from the bathing-machines, the cliffs grew higher and grander, and lifted a steeper barrier against the waves that beat beneath ; until all of a sudden the wanderer passed the proudest headland of all, and came where the sea had taken its revenge. A mighty landslip had rent away a mile or two of the wall that had looked down upon the waves for centuries, and torn out a new edge to the coast at least a hundred yards farther back than the old one. Between the two there lay a wonderful and glorious ruin, as if some Titanic hand had hurled together a chaos of rock, and tree, and thicket, and moorland, and beach with

indiscriminating rage. Here and there great masses of earth stood as they had fallen from their places, three hundred feet above, with the heath and scented turf that clothed them still unbroken. Towering out of the wreck stood great pinnacles and buttresses of rock, defiant even in their fall, and looking like the ribs of the earth itself exposed to view.

A hundred tiny streams had hollowed themselves out new courses amongst them already, hiding themselves, as their wont had been, beneath a thicket of tangled green; and everywhere their soft voices went whispering round the mighty ruins, as peacefully as though they had not been in league with the mightier waves of the sea outside to work all this destruction, and were not hurrying to join them in triumphing over the victory they had won together.

It was at the top of one of the green combes that ran back from cliffs like these that Lydcombe lay, and the tower of the old church that has been already mentioned

had been a landmark to fishermen in the bay ever since it was built. Part of the hamlet (for it was little more) straggled down one side of the combe itself, and there were always one or two fishing-boats drawn up on the beach beneath ; though this, like almost all other occupations of Lydcombe, had passed almost entirely into the hands of Saltham, that noisy, modern upstart three or four miles to the west. There was a little coastguard station there too, lodged in a shelf of rock, which the blue-jackets had tarred and whitewashed as high as they could reach, with the idea that the truest beauty was to be found in that sort of cleanliness, so sacred to all sailors. And thither, when the pressure of his clerical duties was not very great, the Rev. Albert Carfax had been wont, in his celibate days, to wander, with the pipe that was the relic of his Cambridge life in his mouth ; and sitting upon that whitewashed seat, with the carefully tarred roots of clematis above him, had gazed with a sort of honest vacuity upon

the shimmering sea beneath, and looked vaguely forward to the approaching time when his own Florry should share all these joys with him, side by side. That time had arrived now considerably more than a year, and though perhaps the Rev. Albert did not make quite so many pilgrimages, pipe in mouth, to the coastguard station as he had anticipated, it may safely be said that none of the other domestic joys that he had looked forward to had yet begun to pall, from want of variety, upon his taste. Men more difficult to satisfy than the Rev. Albert might indeed have found quite sufficient happiness to spread over a fair extent of married life in the society of Florry, who added to a very large quantity of commoner attractions the inestimable one of appreciating the Rev. Albert (or rather, the Rev. Bertie), not merely at his own valuation, but at something even higher.

She was a fair, tall, slight English girl, with dove-like eyes, and an infinite capacity within her for devotion and enthusiastic disregard

of self. To say that an infinite capacity is ever satisfied is, no doubt, a contradiction in terms, but the Rev. Bertie was just the man to give such a capacity an alarming quantity of work, and Mrs. Albert Carfax did not find any pressing necessity for devoting herself in other directions at present. There was certainly a more juvenile Bertie, who had lately made his appearance, and whose extremely tender age made no inconsiderable demands upon Florry's time and attention; but she was the very model of a wife, and had quite made up her mind already that such demands must be met at anybody's expense rather than at that of the primary object of devotion. To this proposition the Rev. Bertie, who felt far too honest to ignore his own deserts, very cheerfully assented.

Mrs. Albert Carfax was the "dear friend" at whose house Lena Morden had announced to Mrs. Morden's brother her intention of becoming a visitor; and though the Rev. Bertie did not quite approve of his wife



cherishing a violent affection for anybody or anything in the world but himself, he could hardly with decency raise any objection to a friendship of such long standing as that between Florry and Lena Morden. They had not exactly been schoolgirls together, and perhaps their intimacy would not have been quite so lasting in its nature if they had been, but they had stayed in the same houses, played the same music, and endured the sentimental attentions of the same incipient males, quite long enough to understand each other very well, and to like what they understood. In the opinion of Florry, there never was, and there never would be, a girl so admirable and worthy of imitation in all respects as Lena Morden; and her one regret, expressed with a pertinacity that was almost wearying to its object, was that no man had yet been found sufficiently perfect to be to Lena what "Bertie" was to herself. She never wrote a letter to her paragon without inquiring whether no star capable

of affording such a guiding light had yet appeared on the horizon, and the fact that it had not yet risen had begun to fill her mind with a dreadful apprehension that the paragon was so rare and perfect that no star could ever be found bright enough to guide it, and that it would become necessary for it to complete its existence in the very imperfect and unsatisfactory condition from which she herself had so lately emerged. She did, however, cherish a hope that the spectacle of connubial bliss, which Lena was coming to Lydcombe to witness, might result in awakening the latter's mind to a sense of the peaceful ecstasies to which her eyes were at present shut, and in stimulating her to look about with a less critical glance for some one whose perfections might in some measure resemble those of the Reverend Bertie.

"Bertie dear," said the unselfish matron, as they were driving in the little pony-carriage to meet their expected guest at the Saltham railway station, "don't you think

we might ask young Rudyer over for a day or two next week while Lena is with us? Or perhaps Mrs. Clark's son? I hear he is home from Cambridge."

The Reverend Bertie, though theoretically the most unselfish of men, felt some vague objections to allowing his peaceful home to be put to such unhallowed purposes as those for which his better half apparently destined it, and did not perhaps sympathise with her desire to lead other people into the paradise she had found for herself quite so strongly as, considering the compliment it implied to himself, he ought to have done.

"I don't much mind," he answered doubtfully, stroking his clerical beard as though conscious that neither Mrs. Clark's son nor young Rudyer could vie with him in that particular, "but I don't think it would be quite fair to young Rudyer, you know. He always falls in love when he's home for the holidays, and you had much better let him

do it with some one who'll let him down easier."

Florry only looked half convinced.

"Well, Mrs. Clark's son then," she said despondingly.

"If you ask me," replied the Reverend Bertie, "I think you might just as well ask Mrs. Clark herself; and, as a matter of fact, on the whole, I should like it better. There never used to be such offensive young prigs at Cambridge, in my time."

The Reverend Bertie was rather fond of recalling his own college life, and cherished the idea that his career at St. Margaret's had been wild and reckless in the extreme. He treasured, indeed, a fruiterer's bill for Sunday desserts of a most sumptuous description (which had been principally consumed by the committee who edited an extremely dreary college Magazine, of which he was the secretary), as an incontestable proof of the unlimited extent of his dissipations; and used occasionally, when giving the finishing touch to a ser-

mon prepared for the more critical congregation at Saltham, to congratulate himself upon the moral stability and soundness of principle which had enabled him to check his headlong career on the road to ruin, and attain the peaceful haven in which his lot was now cast, with his wings still unscorched by the fire through which they had passed.

Florry herself, though not believing in her inmost heart that such perfections as those with which her ideal was endowed could ever have been dimmed by the iniquitous associations of all the universities in England, yet sometimes cheated herself into the pleasing fancy that her soft influence had been selected by Providence as the happy agency of delivering the man she loved from so much peril, and with all due modesty plumed her dove-like feathers as she gazed fondly at the rescued brand. But the rescued brand was clearly not disposed to fall in with her wishes on this occasion; and she felt with a sigh that her well-intentioned efforts on behalf of Lena

Morden must be postponed for a more fitting opportunity, when brighter planets than Mrs. Clark's son might be wandering in convenient proximity to the object she desired to bring under some such kindly influence.

They were at the station before she had thought of another planet; and to her horror they found the train already in, and Lena standing at the station-door, rather embarrassed by the rival claims of the Royal Hotel (claiming to be the only hotel in England "standing in its own grounds"), and the Saltham Arms, which exulted in a proud and commanding view of its competitor's chimneys. With so much ardour were these distinguishing advantages being pressed upon the new arrival by the conscientious 'bus-drivers, that all access to the bewildered stranger was temporarily blocked up, and Florry's transports of welcome were necessarily conveyed to her guest over their toughened shoulders, which the friction of generations

of luggage had rendered almost insensible to human touch.

The 'bus-drivers were dispersed at last, by dint of the Reverend Bertie wagging his pastoral beard at them, and betook themselves to the partition of a solitary commercial traveller, in default of larger game. It is perhaps unnecessary to relate whether the grounds or the view proved most seductive in his eyes, and by what process of mental ratiocination he arrived at his decision; but it may be mentioned that the bagman's selection was made, without undue delay, at the precise moment that the pony-carriage drove off, and Florry, leaning back in the seat with a sigh of intense gratification, said, "Now, Lena darling, that is Bertie, and you must promise to think of him exactly as if he was your brother from this very moment!"

## CHAPTER VI.

LEAVING undecided the question whether three miles of Devonshire lanes succeeded in accustoming Lena to the new relationship which had been found for her, by the time the Vicarage at Lydcombe had been reached, it may be as well to see how Frank Morden, whose proffered twinklings had been thought insufficient to perform the functions of a guiding star by that critical young lady, and who had no Devonshire lanes to go to, attempted to console himself for the very uncomplimentary dismissal which he had been compelled to undergo.

Frank Morden was undoubtedly not the sort of man who would have satisfied Florry's



aspirations on behalf of her paragon, any more than he satisfied those of the paragon herself ; but he was, perhaps, quite as deserving a young gentleman as Mrs. Clark's eldest hope, and had not as yet exhibited any of that fatal facility in developing attachments which had been young Rudyer's bane through life. The passion which had just been nipped so rudely in the bud had really grown up with the boy's very nature, and the revulsion of feeling which followed upon the process of nipping left a general sense of disquiet over the whole of his moral being. He had written a pleading sort of appeal to his cousin the day after the night on which he had left her in the garden (and had afterwards quarrelled, in his pigmy fashion, with the new fountain of honour to all the Mordens, on their way back to town), imploring her to give him one more chance, and reiterating his conviction of the amount of happiness they might jointly enjoy if he were only allowed to marry her first, and "gain her heart" afterwards. The letter

concluded with a brief mention, from the writer's point of view, of the incident in the railway carriage, written under the apprehension that, if it was not alluded to, she might hear of it first from other and less favourable sources; but the narrative, even as given by Frank himself, was not at all a successful one, and had an extremely distasteful effect upon his cousin's mind.

It seemed to her quite outrageous that such a boy as her rejected suitor should venture to obtrude his own views and desires upon Mr. Rothery Selfert at all, but she blushed up to the ears to think that he had done so in such a manner as to represent her in Mr. Selfert's eyes as the passive recipient of his boyish addresses, and the almost fatherly allusion that gentleman had afterwards made to such a possibility was hardly more disagreeable to her than the first consciousness that she might expect such allusions had been. Consequently, she answered her cousin Frank's letter very

shortly indeed, but at sufficient length to express a most energetic refusal to entertain for a single day the ideas of future happiness suggested for her consideration by that young gentleman, which iced the warmth of his sanguine aspirations very effectually indeed. The desolation it brought upon his soul was succeeded, after a brief interval, by a sullen determination to revenge himself by obliterating his weakness altogether, and forgetting, as soon as he could manage it, all about the happiness of the thankless being in whose welfare he had vainly attempted to interest himself.

The only difficulty in carrying this laudable resolution into effect was, that he really had not the slightest idea how to set about it. Lying awake at night, and swearing to banish every thought of the heartless woman who has jilted you from your mind, may be an excellent preparation for the process of banishment itself, but it is not exactly the same thing ; and yet, for the first week after

the resolution was formed, it was quite as far as Frank Morden got. He knew, theoretically, that it is difficult to expel the remembrance of even the most heartless of women from one's mind, except by the aid of some other woman, with more or less heart, as the case may be ; but his range of female society was too limited for him to know exactly where to turn for such assistance ; and, to say the truth, he felt some dread of the details of the necessary procedure. It was essential, he felt, to find some lady who would take all responsibility for such details upon herself ; and though he was not so inexperienced as to be ignorant that many such ladies are to be found, he was not aware of any lady within the limits of his acquaintance, who possessed the necessary qualifications for the desired process.

He was reading for his army examination, intending to go into the cavalry, and was in the habit of going up to London every day to his "coach," who was driving him, in

company with sundry other promising young gentlemen, through the course of study prescribed by a beneficent government for such purposes, and had chambers in a street off the Strand dedicated to that occupation. There was an eating-house not far from Charing Cross to which he was often accustomed to resort, during the hour in the middle of the day at which the coach stopped to give the wearied travellers an opportunity for refreshment; and there, in much lowness of spirits, he betook himself one day when his resolution was nearly a week old, after journeying over a very severe stage of modern European history, considered from a strategical point of view. There were one or two other young gentlemen, who had booked seats by the same educational conveyance, generally ready to enliven him with their society on such occasions, but since his discomfiture Frank had felt disinclined to share in the light-hearted revelry which characterised their joint repasts during that festive

hour, and was getting into the habit of stealing off to partake of a solitary and misanthropical chop by himself. On this particular day the lean of his chop appeared more smoky, and the fat more abhorrent to his feelings, than ever; and he sat moodily over the dregs of his half-pint of cheap claret, with a growing conviction that he was of all men the least fitted for bachelor fare, and an increasing sense of the atrocious wrong his cousin Lena had done him by refusing to come and personally superintend his repasts for the future.

He finished the triumphant result of Mr. Gladstone's beneficent legislation at last, and stalked gloomily up to the bar to liquidate the expenses of his entertainment, and to obtain a light for the cigar with which, at such periods of the day, he was accustomed to solace his feelings, from the attendant Hebe who presided there. This particular Hebe knew him very well by sight, and had done him the same kindly office on more

than one previous occasion, when his heart had been less crushed by its experiences of the falsity of woman, and he had felt more able to join in the light and playful courtesies which are common between such Hebes and those to whom they minister.

"Dear me," said that young lady, "and I'm not to have 'thank you' for it, I suppose?"

"I'm really awfully sorry, Lizzie," said Frank, feeling that Lizzie, at any rate, had done him no wrong, and could not be expected to understand how difficult it was for a sensitive nature like his own, when overwhelmed by misfortune, to wear its wonted garb before the curious eyes of an unsympathising world. "The fact is, I've got the deuce of a headache to-day, and hardly know what I'm about."

"It's London air, I suppose," said the young lady, with a sympathetic glance. "I often get 'eadaches myself this time of the year. It must be nice to get down

into the country whenever one likes, mustn't it?"

Lizzie, when properly dressed for the afternoon customers, was a young woman of considerable personal attractions, and Frank, though he had no headache further than that for which the Gladstone claret of the preceding day might have been responsible, felt that the expression of her sympathy, "headaches" and all, was not ungrateful to his feelings. And though Lizzie was not a backward young lady in any sense, and would indeed have been quite unfitted for her post if she had been, yet it must be remembered that she was expressing her sympathy with the sufferings of a gentleman who was by no means a perfect stranger to her.

Before Frank's cigar got properly lighted, he had agreed, with a view to the cure of their joint headaches, to take Miss Lizzie Deacle down to the Crystal Palace that evening for a little fresh air; and though



that young lady might have hesitated before trusting herself to a more dangerous-looking cavalier, Frank's downy cheeks and irreproachable style of conversation were sufficient guarantees, in her eyes, of the desirability of his escort. Ladies in that ill-defined stratum of society, in which Miss Deacle had presumably been brought up, are necessarily not so entirely dependent for their relaxations upon the availability of a *chaperon* as their contemporaries a little higher up the social scale; and it must not be supposed that Miss Deacle, in assenting to the arrangement which Frank proposed, was committing any sin against the rules of etiquette or morality by which she was accustomed to govern her conduct. Of course she knew that the society of a gentleman of her own class would be the more regular thing, and more likely to lead to the acquisition of a permanent establishment of her own; but as no gentleman of her own class had offered his services for that evening, she was very well satisfied to take

the gentleman who did ; and the evident fact that his social position was different to her own did not cause her much disquiet.

Frank travelled one or two educational stages further in company with his coach that afternoon, but came away with a very hazy notion of the nature of the country through which the journey had been made. He had a vague sort of idea that his revenge upon his cousin, for what he was pleased to solace himself by calling her perfidy, was about to begin ; but beyond this sensation it cannot be said that he anticipated any particular delights from the manner in which he proposed to spend his evening, or the society which he had succeeded in securing. Miss Lizzie Deacle was true to her appointment at the Victoria station, having apparently had little difficulty in obtaining a temporary release from her position behind the bar ; a post whose duties she had consented to discharge (according to the account she gave Frank) more from a feeling of what she owed to her

family than from any sordid considerations.

"You see it's my uncle keeps the concern," she explained to Frank, "and I ain't going to be too proud to take an easy place with him, with a day off whenever I want to ask for it, instead of going out to one of those railway refreshment places, perhaps, where you all have to dress alike in black or something of that sort, with a rose stuck in the front of your dress, and draw beer for a lot of shop-boys till twelve o'clock every night."

Frank expressed, of course, his admiration of her good sense and discretion, and said that he thought a rose stuck in the front of her dress would look very nice indeed. Lizzie laughed, feeling quite sure that this young gentleman would not succeed in making a fool of her by speeches like that; if he was to attempt such a feat.

"You haven't told me your name, you know," she remarked a little later on in the evening, when they had finished their dinner

(during which Miss Lizzie displayed powers of consumption that appeared quite professional, and she had repeated her previous performance of lighting Frank's cigar for him. "If I'm to come out with you to do this sort of thing, I think I ought to know what to call you."

The young man felt rather guilty; and had a vague sort of feeling that he would be more comfortable when he got home if Miss Deacle did *not* know what to call him.

"My name's Frank," he said, hesitating a little.

"All right," said Lizzie, laughing, "Frank will do very well. I suppose you've got another name, like most other people, but you're afraid I shall look you out in the Directory to see where you live, if I know it. You're quite right not to tell me, if that's what you're thinking of."

"I'm not afraid of any such thing," said Frank, driven into a corner. "My name's Morden—Frank Morden."

"I don't care twopence what it is—it doesn't matter to me," said Lizzie. "How do you spell it?"

Frank, who was keenly alive to the absurdity of entering into such a question of orthography, gave her an envelope of an old letter which he had in his pocket, address and all, by way of reply.

"I shouldn't have believed that was your name at all, if you hadn't shown me this," said Lizzie, eying it closely. "That's where you live, is it? Ain't you afraid I shall come down some day to see you there?"

"I don't think you'll do that," said Frank. "Besides I'm never at home; so you wouldn't find me, if you did."

"I expect I should astonish somebody down there, though," pursued Miss Deacle contemplatively. "You don't live by yourself, I suppose, do you?"

Frank began to wonder how much further into his family affairs Lizzie's interest in him would extend, but could hardly refuse to

answer her questions with a certain amount of truth. The girl had undoubtedly told him all, or what might very well be all, about herself, with the greatest apparent candour ; and her insinuation, that he was afraid to put a like confidence in her, had touched his pride very keenly.

Before her escort bade her good-night at the door of the Metropolitan District Railway Station, with a promise to come and visit her again at her uncle's establishment very shortly, Miss Deacle had extracted from him an amount of information as to his home-life which, twenty-four hours before, he would have laughed to scorn the idea of giving to any stranger ; and though she had not yet heard Lena Morden's name, she was quite aware that there was a young lady in the case, and that the young gentleman's heart was by no means free from the perturbations incident to his sex and age. That Frank did not that night repent his rash confidences quite so bitterly as his timidity

had anticipated, may be taken as a proof that Miss Deacle knew, at any rate, how to make herself agreeable under such circumstances.

## CHAPTER VII.

MR. MORDEN, when he married Mr. Rothery Selfert's sister, was, as that lady scornfully remarked on one or two occasions after the ceremony, a "mere Treasury clerk," and being, like so many other worthy men, a person of far more standing and consequence away from his domestic hearth than beside it, received by virtue of his seniority a very respectable stipend from the country for his services in that capacity. So creditable was the appearance which its amount enabled him to make in general society, that the new Mrs. Morden, when she secured her prey, was under the impression that she was making a much more valuable capture than



actually proved to be the case, and commenced the regulation of her household in accordance with such views. There was another man-servant added to the establishment, and a pony-carriage was already more than talked about ; and Mr. Morden began to feel that however necessary these luxuries might be to the sister of so eminent a Queen's Counsel as Mr. Selfert, the Civil Service regulations, in fixing his annual stipend, had not contemplated that they should be supplied at his expense. He had once or twice, in his timid way, brought the amount of his salary under her notice—and indeed, he could not have concealed it from her for twenty-four hours, had he been desirous of doing so—but the knowledge was very far from producing the desired effect upon her mind. She was one of those women (generally among the most delightful of their sex) who are naturally incapable of estimating the value of money, or judging what sort of expenditure a particular income

will warrant ; and only knew that her first matrimonial venture had not been very successful in a pecuniary point of view, her former lord and master having left her nothing but a small life-income, part of which she lost by her second marriage. To do her justice, she was not a mercenary woman, and thought very little about the matter indeed ; but she knew that either out of the Treasury savings, or from some other source, Mr. Morden had accumulated enough to add a little independent income to his earnings, and carefully abstained from allowing him to tell her its amount. This was by no means from any idea that it ought ultimately to go to Lena, or any other motives of like delicacy, but rather from a desire to cherish a feeling of unlimited resources to fall back upon, and also to keep in reserve the power of upbraiding the Treasury clerk, on some future occasion, with his neglect to confide in the wife he had taken to his bosom. She had never, of course, made any

suggestion of producing, for general purposes, such of the income left to her by her late husband as she still enjoyed, which she looked upon as her own peculiar private property, quite in the way the sportsman views the tiger-skin which hangs, a trophy of his prowess, over his smoking-room arm-chair; and Mr. Morden had not the faintest idea what the amount of such income might be. He only knew that he never saw a sovereign in her purse that had not come out of his, or a bill receipted save in answer to a cheque with his signature, and hoped that when he got more accustomed to Mrs. Morden, he might venture to broach the delicate subject. This had been in the sanguine days which followed immediately after his capture, when it was still reasonable to hope that his leg would grow used in time to the iron teeth which grasped it; but it had not taken him long to arrive at the conclusion that such ideas were worse than chimerical, and that his courage would never

prove equal to the arduous task he had once thought it possible he might undertake. But it appeared to him that Mrs. Morden's expenditure was not of a nature likely to decrease from natural causes, and it became more and more necessary that something should be done or said on the subject.

Mr. Morden was not nearly so afraid of other men, even of his wife's relations, as he was of his wife; and though unpleasant, it did not appear to him impossible to say a word or two to Mrs. Morden's brother on the subject. He knew, of course, that he could not expect to do so without receiving a subsequent moral castigation of the severest description; but this he thought would not be more difficult to bear than the daily corrections he received for matters which he had been all his life accustomed to regard as innocent and blameless, and whereof his conscience accused him not. He fancied, timidly conscious of the craven submission with which some of these corrections had been

received, that it might be easier to combat Mrs. Morden's displeasure if his conscience told him that he was not guiltless of having done something to awaken it.

Mr. Morden was released from his Treasury duties on Saturdays at two o'clock, and took his way one hot July afternoon to Mr. Selfert's chambers in the Temple, having ascertained that none of the Courts sat after that hour, and that the great lawyer would probably therefore be then accessible. Mr. Selfert's clerk scanned him very closely indeed, to see if he was an attorney, and appeared to consider that a personal injury was inflicted on himself by the fact of any gentleman, who wished to see Mr. Selfert, belonging to any less interesting class of individuals. It is obvious that the present system by which barristers' clerks obtain their emoluments, must result, at any rate, in causing them to take a lively interest in their master's professional well-doing, and in the visitors he receives.

Mr. Morden's card having been taken in

to Mr. Rothery Selfert, not by the insulted clerk but by the clerk's young man (who appeared, in a less conspicuous way, almost as much outraged as his superior, as became one who was interested in his master's fees to the extent of threepence in the half-crown which the higher official received on the guinea), Mr. Rothery Selfert was gracious enough to send back an immediate message, requesting Mr. Morden to walk in, which Mr. Morden, feeling that much of his confidence was leaving him, and with the same sensation that he usually experienced when about to go to bed, promptly did.

Mr. Rothery Selfert moved in his seat as if in welcome to his brother-in-law, rising about an inch and a quarter higher from his chair than he usually did for a solicitor of unblemished reputation and position, and not getting very high after all, and pushed away a towering mass of brief paper, relating principally to the reputed manor and the exhausted

minerals, which rather overshadowed the cane-bottomed chair in which Mr. Morden, who always endeavoured to be unobtrusive, was taking his modest seat.

"I dare say you can manage to find room, Morden," said the great man condescendingly. "Yes, shove all that out of your way."

Mr. Morden was much embarrassed by the flattering nature of this reception, but he moved his hands timidly as if to carry out Mr. Selfert's directions as to "shoving out of the way," and tried to look happy and comfortable. There was a fabulous sum marked in guãs, upon the papers which were to be thus contemptuously treated, and Mr. Selfert's guest felt as if it was almost sacrilege to lay a disrespectful hand upon them. The very atmosphere around that inscription seemed as if it were impregnated with an aroma of opulence.

"I thought I might be fortunate enough to find you disengaged," said Mr. Morden ner-

vously, "it being Saturday afternoon; and I had just a word or two I wanted to say to you."

"I can give you a quarter of an hour very well," answered the lawyer in what he really meant to be a cordial tone, "if that will do for you. There's that confounded bill coming on again on Monday, and I hear Bumpus is going to make himself objectionable, as usual. He ought to be kicked out of the House."

All this pretence that their thoughts and interests were identical was intended to set the Treasury clerk at his ease, but it only impressed Mr. Morden, who had never heard of Bumpus in his life, and felt no particular animosity towards that hero of debate, with a deeper sense of the gulf between them, and the absurdity of expecting so great a man to take any interest in his Liliputian embarrassments.

"The fact is, Mr. Selfert" (he would have given a great deal to have been able to say "Selfert" without the prefix, but the profanity



stuck in his throat), "I want to speak to you about business. I don't know if you've heard anything about my circumstances?"

There was a knock at the door as Mr. Morden got to this point, and the clerk, who considered that the barrister was acting almost unprofessionally in allowing so much of his time to be consumed without profit, came in with a bundle of papers which had been lying in the clerk's room at least three days uncared for.

"Not just now, Brooking," said Mr. Selfert, who generally addressed Brooking in a tone of greater deference than he used to almost anybody else; "just put those down, and say I am engaged for the next ten minutes, if any one calls."

Brooking put the papers on a side table, and retired, leaving a stronger whiff of guineas about the room than ever.

"About your circumstances?" said Mr. Selfert. "No, I'm not aware that anything has been said to me. Perhaps, in my sister's

interests, I ought to have made some inquiry, but I took it for granted she'd look after that sort of thing for herself. You're in the Treasury, I believe?"

"Oh yes," said Mr. Morden almost proudly, feeling that not even Mrs. Morden's family could take any objection to his position there. "I've some seniority, you know, and they've treated me very fairly, considering. But I've very little else to look to, and I don't think Mrs. Morden quite understands my position. Perhaps you'd say a word to her on the subject?"

"Who?—I?" said the barrister, opening his eyes rather wide. "It's too late for that sort of thing now, isn't it?"

Mr. Morden felt with a sigh that it was indeed too late, and wished devoutly that there had been somebody to caution Mrs. Morden against the step she meditated a year ago, when her fell design was first conceived. He was compelled to admit, in answer to his brother-in-law, that he was

aware that the Rubicon had been passed; and he felt bound to add, with more politeness than truth, that he had found the stream an extremely easy and pleasant one to ford. The exact object of his visit to the Temple was more difficult to explain, but Mr. Selfert, who had a fair knowledge of the peculiarities of "Catherine" to assist his comprehension, drew it all out of him with professional expertness at last, and felt that it would be like kicking a man in the stocks to reproach him with being too much of a moral coward to speak to that lady himself. He could not engage that "Catherine" should take his representations in exactly the right spirit, but he promised that some representation should be made.

"She lost half her income by marrying a second time, you know, Morden," said Mr. Selfert explanatorily.

"I can't say I exactly knew that," said Mr. Morden, as if he felt it necessary to apologise for his ignorance. "As to the

amount of what she may have left, I haven't an idea."

"I'd take care I *had* an idea, for the future, if I were you, Morden," said the barrister, with something very like compassion in his tone. "She's got about £200 a year left, but I think she's fond of putting it by, you know. I'm one of her trustees, of course."

"I've always tried to put by something, myself," said Mrs. Morden's husband, rather astonished at the information which had just been given him. "Of course I've got my daughter to look after. I'm afraid I'm keeping you," pursued Mr. Morden, rising as if to take his departure, as another knock came at the outside door.

"Not at all, I assure you," said Mr. Selfert quite energetically. "Brooking, if that's anybody for me, you must ask him to wait in the other room. Yes, of course you must look after your daughter, Morden. That's the worst of having daughters, I suppose."

"I suppose it is," responded Mr. Morden plaintively. "But she's a very good girl, and I don't grumble at that."

"I dare say somebody will take the trouble of providing for her off your hands soon," said Mr. Selfert, in a tone of suggestion. "I'd see that she didn't get entangled with any penniless young fellow, if I were you. There isn't anything of that sort going on, I suppose?"

"Oh dear no," answered the parent whom Mr. Selfert was cautioning, rather startled at the idea. "Nothing of the sort. Lena never had a secret from me in her life, I believe."

"That's right," said Mr. Selfert warmly. "You were quite right to come to me, and I hope matters will smooth themselves down sooner than you expect. By-the-bye, you're not pressed at all, are you?"

"Pressed?" repeated Mr. Morden, not quite understanding the other's meaning, and thinking that if he meant to refer to the

phenomena of matrimonial life, "squeezed" would be a more truthful and expressive term.

"Pressed for money, ready money, I mean," said the barrister. "The best of us are, sometimes. Because I shall be delighted to let you have a couple of hundred or so, if you want it. Only say the word, if it's any convenience, and I'll write you a cheque at once."

"Upon my word you're very kind," said the recipient of this liberal offer, who was quite unused to that sort of consideration, even at the Treasury, and who would have liked to cash a cheque for a couple of hundred or so very much. "I couldn't think of such a thing, thank you. But I'm very much obliged to you—I am indeed."

"No obligation at all," said the other. "I always have to keep a pretty large balance at the bank—Brooking manages that—and you may just as well have the benefit of some of it as the London and Westminster. Let me

know if you change your mind. I suppose I must see that fellow outside, now."

"I'm afraid I've taken up a great deal of your valuable time," said Mr. Morden, more humble than ever in his gratitude.

"Not at all, not at all," said the barrister. "You've been an absolute godsend, compared to some of the men I have to see. I've no doubt, when Brooking lets that fellow in, he'll make himself perfectly unendurable for the next half-hour!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

IT was with a guilty conscience and much foreboding of heart, chiefly manifesting itself in even greater anxiety than usual to prevent his nether limbs from falling into attitudes that might be open to objection, that Mr. Morden cowered under his wife's eye during the next day or two, while the full measure of his iniquity was to that lady still unknown. It would, indeed, have been almost a relief to his mind had the critical view she took of his ordinary little domestic delinquencies been expressed even as loudly as usual; but, on the contrary, his tendency to remorse was fostered and coaxed into life by a display on the part of his better half of more suavity



and peacefulness of temper than had yet been exhibited since the waning of their brief honeymoon, and Mr. Morden blinked under the unwonted placidity of her gaze with an increasing dread of the storm that was brewing above his head. Perhaps the fair weather that prevailed was in a measure owing to the fact that, in the absence of her step-daughter, Mrs. Morden was able to forget that craving for the sympathy of the latter which made itself so painfully sensible to her expansive breast when that young lady was present. Whatever might have been the cause, such an effect certainly made itself visible ; and Mr. Morden at times began almost to think, that if the pony-carriage suggestion could have been resisted by his unaided efforts, matters might have "smoothed themselves down" sufficiently for him to keep his matrimonial feet, without the necessity of having to consult Mr. Rothery Selfert after all.

The consultation had, however, been effected ; and though Mr. Morden might

have been relieved if Mr. Selfert had neglected to fulfil his promise of making a representation to "Catherine," he felt quite sure that the representation would be made; and the awful and ominous silence which enlivened his dinner, when he came back from the Treasury, three days after his visit to the Temple had been accomplished, needed no explanation to warn him of the coming storm. It was Mrs. Morden's majestic fancy that her drawing-room was not to be polluted by any altercations, however one-sided in their character, between husband and wife; and she was accustomed to reserve such trifling criticisms as Mr. Morden's conduct and deportment demanded for the less holy regions upstairs, where she had her victim better under command. There is an ingenious print which has been circulated by some of the enthusiastic opponents of scientific vivisection, representing an elaborate combination of a vice with jagged edges, a common rack (as used by order of the Star-Chamber),

and the apparatus commonly employed for nailing down carpets, which is said to be an exact picture of the machinery used on the Continent for keeping rabbits "quiet" while scientific experiments are going on. It is unlikely that Mrs. Morden's attention had been called to this instructive engraving, but her preference for the connubial bed-chamber, as the scene of any little correction required by Mr. Morden's imperfect nature, was no doubt actuated by similar considerations. Mr. Morden was so much more easily "kept quiet" upstairs.

The storm broke as soon as the necessities of Mr. Morden's existence had forced him into the apartment which Mrs. Morden had selected as her operating room, and Mr. Morden cowered even lower than usual beneath the fury of the blast.

"To think that a man should be afraid to speak to his wife for himself!"

"My dear, I did speak," said "the man," submissively, "but I thought you did not

quite understand. It seemed to me that your brother would be able to put the matter so much more clearly before you than I could do."

"Understand this, Mr. Morden," said the outraged lady, in a tone that made the "man" quake, "I will have no complaints carried to my brother, or to anybody else, as long as I am mistress in this house. No one shall come between us, do you hear?"

Mr. Morden, alas! heard, and knew that it was as she said. No one should deliver him out of her hands.

"As to my expenses," pursued the operator, having thus made sure of her grip, "I wonder what you mean by daring to mention such a subject! Didn't you undertake to support me at the altar?"

"*With all my worldly goods I thee endow,*" had been the fatal words, and Mr. Morden shivered as they came back to his memory. He had fancied that some general power of control over the endowment was reserved to

the endower, but could not in his confusion recall any particular part of the service which supported such an idea. He was quite certain, however, that such endowment ought to be reciprocal, although the Prayer-book might be silent on the subject, and the thought of the £200, which Mrs. Morden still enjoyed yearly, passed through his mind.

"I certainly did say something about money to Mr. Selfert, my dear," observed the victim, blenching from the steel. "My expenses have been so very heavy lately. I'm afraid Mr. Selfert thought I wanted to borrow money from him."

"You may borrow money from anybody who is fool enough to lend it to you, as far as I am concerned," said the lady scornfully. "Only I don't intend to live like a pauper. That girl's dress costs more than all my expenses put together."

"What, Lena!" said the unhappy father, aghast at such an assertion. "I allow her thirty pounds a year."

“Thirty fiddlesticks,” said the lady contemptuously. “If you’re such a beggar as you make out, why doesn’t she do something for herself—go out as a governess, or something of that sort.”

Mr. Morden gasped for breath at such a monstrous suggestion, never having looked upon poor Lena’s personal expenditure in the serious light in which it presented itself to her step-mother’s eyes.

“I’m afraid you don’t suit each other very well,” he observed timidly, remembering little confidences that had taken place between his daughter and himself in his dressing-room since Mrs. Morden had assumed the direction of his household.

“Suit each other!” said the lady who had done him that greatest of favours, with inexpressible scorn. “I should think not! And I may as well tell you, Mr. Morden, that unless your daughter is prepared to treat me, for the future, in the manner to which I have been accustomed from—young persons of

her age, I can't allow her to continue in my house. I suppose my happiness is your first consideration !”

Mr. Morden was allowed to go to sleep at last, having purchased this indulgence by abstaining from any protest against the very uncomfortable suggestion as to his family arrangements which had thus been thrust in his face, but he was thoroughly dismayed by the possible prospect he saw before him. It did seem hard that, as a punishment for his desire to retrench by giving up a pony-carriage, he should be told that he must suppress his daughter ; but he felt that if his tyrant was really in earnest in making such a menace, and pressed it to the bitter end, he was not strong enough to resist. It certainly appeared to him a monstrous thing that such a total disruption of his domestic happiness should be even possible, simply because his wife was too arrogant and exacting to live in peace with a girl whom he did not in his heart believe guilty of a

single fault ; and he cast about feebly in his mind, with a consciousness that it was his duty to do so, for something that he might call in to the aid of his own nerveless will in this matter, in order to cope with hers. All day long he carried his burden with him, and yet found no place, even in the Treasury, where he could lay it down. He had made up his mind to be more or less miserable at home for the rest of his existence, but what a fearful thing it was that he should have put it in this woman's power to disturb the peace of his daughter's life as well ! His wife's happiness to be his first consideration ! The words, as he repeated them to himself, seemed almost a mockery ; and he knew very well that not even as she uttered them, could she have deluded herself into a belief in their truth.

By dint of perseveringly thinking over the matter till the horrible novelty had in some measure worn off, he at last came almost to the conclusion that the least miserable



course, after all, would be to let his wife have her way in the matter. There had been a semblance of peace between them, as has been said, since Lena's presence had ceased to be a daily cause of irritation, and he thought with a shudder what a Gehenna might 'be made of his home if she were to return against his wife's consent! At any rate for a time, it might be better that Lena should cease to be an inmate of such a household; and though he was more wretched than ever at the idea of such a separation, he saw no other way by which she could be spared the constant and daily distress under which he had already seen her suffering.

Of course it could not be such a trial to her to leave her home for a time, under such circumstances, as it was to him to part with her, and he hoped he might even be able to find her a home in which she might be tolerably happy, despite the separation. The world had not dealt well with

the Morden family, in a pecuniary point of view, and his elder brother, who was the incumbent of a poor London parish, drew a considerably smaller stipend from it than that with which the seniority of the Treasury clerk was rewarded ; but Mr. Morden thought that even his wife could not decently prevent his making such pecuniary arrangements with the London incumbent as should give his daughter a temporary home with her uncle. If he was driven to such an expedient, he thought that this could be managed, but the prospect of having to carry out such an idea was by no means pleasant in his eyes.

It did occur to Mr. Morden, after his mind was almost made up, that there might be some objections to this plan. Lena had spoken of her "cousin Frank" as having become even a greater infliction, from her peculiar point of view, than Mrs. Morden ; but her father could hardly bring himself to believe that this would be a serious obstacle

to her consenting to become an inmate of his father's house. He did not himself see why they should not suit each other very well, in time; and if Lena had not protested so violently against the absurdity of such "childish" pretensions, would not himself have objected to the prospect of such a provision for her future, despite Mr. Selfert's denunciations of the evils of a "penniless entanglement." At any rate, if her only objection to her cousin was that he was childish, he hoped that she was not likely to make any fuss about the necessity of living under his father's roof, if that should be required of her.

Frank Morden, who had been in the habit of running down to Kew to his uncle's house often enough, so long as he expected to find his cousin Lena there to welcome him, had not thought it necessary to continue such visits when that motive ceased to attract, and Mr. Morden had not seen his nephew since the evening on which his "childishness" had been displayed. Perhaps, if he had not

known that Lena was in Devonshire, even the consolatory society of Miss Deacle would not have been sufficiently engrossing to have prevented him from making another attempt at the reconciliation which he had been unable to effect by post. It is astonishing what a lot of singeing some moths' wings will take!

"We haven't seen you down at Kew lately," said Mr. Morden, meeting his nephew one afternoon while waiting for the five o'clock train at the Waterloo terminus.

Frank had come to the station simply to meet his new consoler, having got into the habit of indulging himself with her society at least once a week, and looked round to make sure she was not in sight before he answered, with a very uncomfortable sensation of guilt. "You see it's such a nuisance getting about at night, and all my days are pretty well taken up."

"Come down when you've nothing better to do," said Mr. Morden, who was not afraid

of his nephew, "but don't put yourself out of the way. What are you doing with yourself to-night?"

"I'm to meet a—a man here to go down to Richmond with and dine," said Frank—lying, of course, but being certainly compelled to a lie, under the circumstances. "All well at Kew?"

Mr. Morden—lying also, equally of course—intimated that such was fortunately the case.

"Lena's away, I hear," said Frank, feeling like a moth that has been injured by having its candle unfeelingly blown out.

"She won't be back for a fortnight or three weeks," answered Mr. Morden. "I've been thinking of asking your father to take her in for a little when she comes back. We're going to have the house turned upside down—painting and papering."

"I'm sure he'd be delighted," said Frank, a little scared by the brilliancy of the prospect, and just then catching sight of a hat very

like Miss Deacle's in the refreshment-room.

"That's your train, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," said Mr. Morden, without displaying that alacrity to secure his seat which had been hoped for by his informant. "Just mention it to your father, will you?"

"Oh, of course," answered Frank, wishing most devoutly that they were not standing in such a conspicuous part of the platform, and keeping a watchful eye on the refreshment-room door. "You'd better hurry up, I think."

Mr. Morden did at last hurry up, according to his nephew's recommendation, and left the latter free to join Miss Deacle in the refreshment-room—a trysting-place which, perhaps because it was endeared to her by professional associations, she especially affected.

"That was the governor, I suppose, wasn't it?" she asked, when the first emotion of the meeting was over.

"Oh no," said Frank, not thinking it necessary to explain the exact nature of the rela-

tionship to Miss Lizzie. "I'm afraid I've kept you waiting, but I couldn't very well get away, you know."

"Of course not, if he was your governor," said Lizzie, who was gifted with quite the average power of seeing through a stone wall; "but you say he wasn't?"

"Oh dear no," said Frank again. "Just wait here a minute while I get the tickets, will you?"

Miss Deacle did not like being treated with a want of confidence, and almost wished she had emerged from the refreshment-room a little sooner. Some reward was due to her, she thought, for her discretion in having abstained from so doing.

"I suppose you don't like being seen with me—that's about it," she said.

"Don't be cross, Lizzie," said Frank, who was still rather afraid of his companion. "You can be as jolly as possible, when you like."

Miss Deacle saw that there was nothing

to be gained by being "cross," and allowed Frank to procure the tickets, having taken a very accurate mental photograph of the apparent "governor" for purposes of future recognition. It is not difficult to be "jolly" at Richmond on a summer's evening, but notwithstanding Lizzie's efforts, on this particular occasion her jollity rather hung fire; and Frank, whose mind was a little distracted by the prospect of his cousin's society which was dangling before his eyes, did not, it is to be feared, contribute as much to her amusement as is generally expected from an escort on similar occasions.

"You're not very lively to-night," said the young lady, as they were going back in a first-class carriage after dinner. "I don't wonder she wouldn't have anything to say to you, if you were always as slow as this."

From which it may be seen that Frank had confided to his consolatrix something more than was to be gathered from the back of the envelope he had shown her. Young gentle-



men with constitutions like Frank Morden's are very prone to feel the absolute necessity of unburdening their oppressed souls when in such companionship; and still more prone afterwards to regret the indiscretion with which they may have done so.

"You can't tell how I've been bothered all day," said Frank apologetically, not wishing at that moment to alienate all the world from him. "That's why I like being with you—you keep me going, you know."

"I dare say," observed the young lady sarcastically. "Don't you think it's very good of me to take so much trouble with you?"

"I don't know about that," said Frank, "but you're a sort of relief sometimes, one way or the other." This certainly was not too strong a compliment to be swallowed, and he was observant enough, even in his depression, to detect a cloud on Lizzie's face. "You could be awfully nice if you chose, I know," he added, feeling that some emenda-

tion was necessary. "I wish you'd take a little more trouble."

"Then I shan't choose," said Lizzie rather brusquely, being accustomed to rather stronger doses of flattery from her admirers, "so it's no good your expecting it."

"You may as well say something kind to a fellow," said Frank, trying at the same time to "say something kind" rather nearer Miss Deacle's face than was quite necessary for the ordinary purposes of kindness.

"Hands off, if you please," said that young lady, who was not yet conciliated.

There certainly seemed to be something unlucky about the manner in which the manifestations of Frank's affection were received by its objects.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE arrangements which were being made in London for Lena's future happiness had not yet penetrated to Devonshire, or they might have caused her an amount of discomposure, which would have interfered with her appreciation of the conjugal merits of the Reverend Bertie. As it was, it may be doubted whether she as yet regarded that amiable cleric quite in the paternal light which had been suggested to her on her arrival, and Florry was by no means satisfied with the amount of emulation which the contemplation of her own unheard-of good fortune appeared to have kindled in her unmated paragon's mind.

"It is such a happy thing to have some-

body whom you can go and ask about any difficulty of that sort as soon as you get puzzled," said Mrs. Carfax, referring to certain doubts which had arisen concerning the soundness of the views contained in a new manual of private devotion which had been imported by the Saltham bookseller.

"Yes," responded Lena, a little dubiously, thinking privately that the happiness would depend more upon the nature of the answer to be obtained than the opportunity of inquiry. "It must be very nice, of course."

"Bertie always satisfies me so completely," continued the enthusiastic matron, insisting on her privileges. "And he never seems to be taken by surprise by anything, I may say. That's what I like so much. Haven't you found that yourself?"

"Of course a man with his education must understand these things better than we do," said Lena, rather evading the question of her own personal experience of Bertie's

mental resources, and feeling that perhaps she had not yet gauged his intellect.

"Ah, but it's something more than education with him," said Mrs. Carfax triumphantly. "You can't help seeing that."

"You know I hardly know anything of him, compared to you," said Lena, feeling that the lukewarmness of her views on the subject required something in the way of apology. "He is almost a stranger to me, still."

"Of course you don't live with him, as I do," said Florry pityingly. "I do wish we weren't going away so soon, and then you might stay with us till you understood him ever so much better. I don't like to think of your going back to that dreadful Mrs. Morden almost directly."

"It isn't very pleasant, certainly," said Lena, who had managed for a time to get rid of the disagreeable image of her step-mother among the Devonshire lanes. "Only I suppose I shall get used to it by-and-by."

"If there was only anybody good enough for you to marry!" said Florry, with a little sigh at the uncertainty of the future. "I suppose you're quite sure that cousin of yours won't do?"

"It isn't the least bit possible," said Lena, with a great deal of determination. "I didn't tell you that he went and made a fuss to Mr. Selfert about me, did I?"

"Who is Mr. Selfert?" asked Florry. "You haven't said a word about him before."

"He's Mrs. Morden's brother," said Lena, with a sort of feeling that however remarkable a man Mr. Selfert might be in himself, that was the salient point about him, after all. "Mr. Rothery Selfert—in Parliament, and a barrister, you know, and all that sort of thing. Papa says he's the cleverest man at the bar."

"Then he isn't very young, I suppose?" said Florry, pricking up her ears.

"Oh no, quite old," answered Lena. "That is, you know, he isn't young—nearly as old

as papa, I should think. But then, of course, he's not old for a man. I didn't think him old at all—at the time."

"What time?" asked Mrs. Carfax, not quite understanding this qualification of the first verdict pronounced on the age of the gifted being of whom they were speaking. "He can't be very young, I should think, if he's Mrs. Morden's brother. He hasn't got any sons, I suppose?"

"Oh dear no," said Lena, feeling that she must have given an absurdly patriarchal idea of Mr. Selfert's time of life. "He isn't married at all, and he's not the least like Mrs. Morden. She used to live with him once, I believe, but I don't think they suited each other very well."

"Why?" asked Florry, who was getting a little out of her depth, and was not accustomed often to allow the conversation to wander so far from Bertie's excellencies, except when prophetically surveying those of Bertie junior.

"I don't know—exactly," answered Lena,

who remembered one or two expressions concerning Mrs. Morden's peculiarities which had fallen from Mr. Selfert's lips, but was checked by a kind of idea that he had not expected her to publish such unwonted confidences. "He saw something of the way in which she and I disagreed, and said something to me about it. He meant to be kind, I think."

Mrs. Carfax did not quite understand the quality of kindness which Rothery Selfert had exhibited, but she failed to obtain any more satisfactory definition of the manner in which the exhibition had been made, as Bertie just then came in for his tea in a state of exhaustion produced by a pastoral expedition to Saltham on foot, which required the immediate administration of that sustaining fluid. The manual of devotion was produced as soon as he was partially restored, but Bertie declared that they had been making a mountain out of the smallest of mole-hills, and promised that certain passages



should be introduced into his sermon next Sunday, which should remove the faintest possibility of doubt from their minds. Beyond this he would not commit himself by any extra-official utterances, feeling, doubtless, that on certain theological questions not even a Cambridge man is safe in giving an extemporary opinion.

Mr. Rothery Selfert did not again become the subject of conversation that evening, that being a period of the day at which Mr. Carfax required a good deal of conjugal attention at Florry's hands. But the next morning there came a letter from Mr. Morden which discomposed Lena's thoughts a good deal, and quite drove the difficulty which Florry had raised on the private devotion question out of her mind. The Reverend Bertie, who had taken occasion to fortify his mind on the point since he had been appealed to for guidance the night before, was almost disgusted by the want of attention paid by his guest to the exposition he had prepared.

"Such difficulties are entirely the creation of those who are responsible for the divisions in the church," he was saying with some warmth. "I don't know if you quite understand me, Miss Morden?"

"Do let her read her letter, Bertie," said Florry, with perhaps less wifely respect than she was accustomed to exhibit. But it must be remembered that, as Mrs. Bertie, she had already, since the previous evening, enjoyed an opportunity of hearing a full clerical discussion on the subject. "What is it about, Lena!"

"You may read it, if you like to take the trouble," said Lena, throwing it across the table with an assumption of indifference.

The permission was not intended to apply to her host, but was appropriated to himself by that slighted divine with an unconscious coolness to which it was difficult to take exception.

"It seems rather hard on you, I must say," he remarked, passing it on to Florry, after a

dilatory exhaustion of its contents which tried that lady's patience considerably. "You'd better read it, Florry."

"I never heard such a shameful thing in my life!" exclaimed Florry when she had mastered it in her turn.

"Poor old man," said Lena, in a voice that tried to be composed, "he means to be as kind as possible. It's harder on him than on anybody else, in reality."

"I wish we could keep you with us always," said Florry, giving her back her father's letter. "How long do they mean you to stay with your uncle, do you suppose?"

"Not a day longer than I can help," answered Lena, thinking how easy it would be for Frank Morden to worry her to death in the asylum which it was proposed to open for her reception. "Of course I must go there for a little, as they've settled it all between them."

"What a pity it all is!" sighed Florry,

thinking of the young Rudyers and Clarks who had been ready, if allowed, to render all this casting about for an asylum unnecessary. She had almost begun to fancy it was her own negligence which had caused her paragon to be still unprovided with a home of her own.

"Don't let us worry about it any more now, please," said Lena, quite understanding what Florry was thinking about. "I dare say I shall manage very well, when the time comes."

"What's all that about a Mr. Selfert?" asked the Reverend Bertie, who had no notion of dropping the subject until the document which had, as he considered, been submitted to him for perusal, had been thoroughly explained to him.

"Oh, that's only Mr. Morden's brother-in-law," said Florry, who saw that Lena was not anxious to give any further explanations, and was rather afraid that Bertie might consider himself slighted if any information

was withheld. "He doesn't seem quite to approve, that's all—no wonder, I'm sure. He's a barrister, Lena says."

"The Q.C., of course—I know," said Bertie complacently, being very proud of such fragments of worldly knowledge as an occasional dinner under the shadow of Exeter cathedral, and a parson's fortnight once a year in London, enabled him to retain in spite of the inaccessibility of the Devonshire lanes. "He's to be Solicitor-general, they say."

"Is he?" said Lena, with something almost of awe in her tone, as she heard this tribute to the splendour of her patron. "I suppose that is a great thing, isn't it? But then he is so very clever, everybody says."

"He was down at Exeter—specially retained—last year," said the clergyman, who did not feel able exactly to define the height of the social pinnacle to which it was suggested that Mr. Selfert might eventually climb. "I don't suppose there is any man at the bar so run after."

"I rather like him," said Lena, who had gathered from her father's letter that the great man had again been called in to the arbitration—adjourned, as it were, from the sitting at which he had formerly taken her under his wing—and had said something which had not, at any rate, been intended as a justification of Mrs. Morden's conduct. "It is so refreshing to talk to a man whose opinion, on any subject, must be worth respecting."

"That's just what I always tell you," said Florry, standing out resolutely for the merits of the conjugal rod on which she herself leaned. Was not the support of a clergyman necessarily better than any other?

They were going to drive to the landslip, about three miles along the cliff, that day, and have a sort of picnic tea in a cottage there which laid itself out for such purposes. The "parson's fortnight" was to be taken next week, so that Lena knew this was to be one of the last days at Lydcombe on which she

would be allowed to forget everything but the sea, and cliff, and sky, and she did her best to get rid of the feeling of discomfort which the post of that morning had left behind in her mind. She wandered away by herself for a few minutes, and climbed up a rugged sheep-track that led up to the higher parts of the cliff till she almost got giddy, and was obliged to sit down before she could begin her descent. As she buried her face in the soft mountain turf, that seemed all tiny flowers and fragrance, and perfumed the air all round like a bed of heliotrope, she could not help for a moment envying Florry, who was to spend her life within reach of such places as that, with the means of satisfying every anxiety, spiritual as well as temporal, always by her side. It hardly seemed to her, just then, that it would be a drawback to be as easily satisfied as Florry was, if the satisfaction was always to be obtained. Only Lena was conscious that her own needs were not likely to discover

anybody who should be able to minister to them in such places as Lydcombe. It was not among such cliffs and such lanes that men like Rothery Selfert grew into full maturity.

"I wonder if I could throw a stone as far as that old crow!" said Mr. Carfax's curate, who made the fourth in the pony-carriage, and had come up the path in search of Miss Morden unperceived. The old crow proved to be not quite within range of the diaconal arm, and the unsuccessful marksman turned round in search of appreciation for his prowess. "So deceptive, you know, Miss Morden, looking down from a height like this! I used to be able to throw a cricket ball a bit, and yet I couldn't get near that point of rock. It's very jolly up here, isn't it?"

"I suppose I must get down again, somehow," said Lena, who did not feel that the jollity of her position had been increased by the new arrival. "They will be putting



the things into the pony-carriage again directly."

"There isn't any hurry," said the young curate, who had not met many girls like Miss Morden at either Lydcombe or even Saltham, and was thinking how satisfactory it would be if she were to stay through the autumn and take a class at the schools. "You've hardly had time to get used to places like this yet, have you, Miss Morden?"

"I don't know," said Lena, stumbling resolutely down without accepting the aid which was eagerly pressed upon her. It did appear to her that half the male population of the world was made up of babies like her cousin Frank.

## CHAPTER X.

MR. SELFERT had indeed expressed himself pretty strongly on what he termed the grossly unreasonable conduct of his sister in making Mr. Morden's house an unendurable home for his own daughter, but that lady, being strongly entrenched in her position, and holding her husband for the most part helpless and at her mercy, was not to be shaken from the ground she had taken up. Lena was to come home for a couple of days, that necessary preparations might be made, and was then to go to her uncle's house for a visit of indefinite length, it being understood between the brothers that the Treasury salary was to be diminished, and the clerical stipend aug-

mented, by such a sum as should neutralise the consequent change in the expenditure of the two households. Perhaps the only individual who contemplated the proposed arrangement with real satisfaction was the young gentleman whom Miss Deacle had taken under her wing. Although Frank did not succeed in persuading himself that such a close view of his imperfections was likely to induce his cousin to change her mind, he cherished a sort of belief that such proximity, even under present circumstances, must be very pleasant. A moth that has anything of a wing left cannot but feel some satisfaction at the prospect of having the candle relighted to complete the business.

The Lydcombe days did not take long in running themselves out, and the pony-carriage carried Lena and her baggage back to the Saltham station again, leaving behind her the great overhanging hedges, still fragrant with white honeysuckle, and the straggling cottages that seemed to be built of red mud,

and the disconsolate curate, and all the other things which had made her life at the Lydcombe parsonage so different from that to which she was used, and to which she was hastening back. It cannot be said that the Reverend Albert Carfax was particularly distressed at the departure of his guest, who had materially altered all his domestic arrangements, and monopolised a good deal too much, in his opinion, of the time and attention which was due to a man with the responsibilities of a whole parish, a curate, and the health of the pony, upon his shoulders. Bertie had generally a feeling, too, that Lena did not believe in him—at any rate, not with the satisfactory and thorough-going faith that formed such an excellent feature in Florry's character; and all things considered, it is not perhaps to be wondered at that the vicar of Lydcombe felt a little relief as he turned the pony's head homeward, after Florry had watched the train steam out of the station.

“Her father must be a very weak man,

altogether," he remarked, as they were driving back. "I don't think she can have been what I call properly brought up, you know."

"Bertie!" remonstrated Florry, who did not like to hear one of her divinities criticising the other, and yet was conscious that the paternal relation which she had so sanguinely prophesied a month ago had not been entirely realised.

"I dare say she might be made a great deal of, if she got into right hands," said Bertie, meaning thereby hands as capable and as determined as his own. "I wish you'd copy out that sermon for me when we get home. I've made such a mess of it that I know I shan't be able to make it out when it comes to Sunday morning."

The journey from Devonshire to London was concluded about the same time as Florry's task, and produced about the same amount of depression in Lena's mind as her conjugal duties in that of the Vicar's wife.

Mr. Morden met his daughter at Waterloo, not looking at all as if the matrimonial yoke had become easier to wear during her absence, and apparently in greater need of being petted and supported by somebody than ever.

"I hope you don't mind, my dear," he said nervously, when they had got into the Kew train, "but Mr. Selfert is to be with us to-night."

"Mr. Selfert!" said Lena, a little startled, feeling that her mind was not sufficiently prepared for an interview with so important a person. The thought, however, that something of her step-mother's edge would be taken off by such a presence, served in some measure to reconcile her to the prospect of the evening's amusement which she found awaiting her.

"Yes, my dear," said her father apologetically. "He asked himself, you know, and of course I couldn't help it."

"Never mind," said Lena, almost gaily,

making the effort which she generally felt to be necessary in order to prevent Mr. Morden's spirits from sinking into the abyss of despair. "I dare say he won't talk to you and me."

"I'm afraid he will, my dear," responded Mr. Morden doubtfully. "He was a good deal displeased when he heard—something that Mrs. Morden said about your coming back, and I'm sure he will say something about it."

"It can't concern him at all, I should think!" said Lena, flushing a little.

Of course, to a certain extent, it was satisfactory to be brought into contact with a man like Mr. Selfert at all, who was about the only man she had ever met who did not come into conflict with the great idea she had always cherished of the superiority of the other sex over her own, but she did not like the notion that the little worries of her own life were the only topics they could have in common. Nevertheless, as she re-

membered, he had so manifested his interest in them on a former occasion that she had been compelled to feel grateful; and she could not be altogether displeased.

Mr. Selfert, who did not choose to talk to "Catherine," and had often already failed in his endeavours to talk to Mr. Morden, exerted himself during dinner to find some other subjects suitable for discussion with Lena, and apparently not without success.

She did not as yet feel able to refer such questions to him as that which had distressed Florry in reference to the devotional manual, and hardly thought that any woman could learn to do so. But she told him a great deal about the Devonshire coombes, and the coastguard station on the cliff, and grew quite enthusiastic as she described the pinnacle from which she had looked down on the crows that sailed from knoll to knoll of the mighty landslip, with the peaceful silence of the sea glowing in the evening sun beneath them all.



Rothery Selfert listened with an amused sort of wonder to the girl who could talk to him so entirely without the constraint that he had a sort of idea he generally carried about with him, as if it were a tonic to administer to society. It sounded very nice and refreshing, and though he did not care to analyse the merits of her conversation, or even to lend a comprehending ear to the whole of it, it was certainly far pleasanter to listen to than the pseudo-philosophical utterances on the advantages of the Juries' Bill, with the supporters of which statesman-like measure he had been carrying on a triumphant struggle during the last fortnight in committee. He had not examined the beauties of the Devonshire coast for himself, and did not much expect ever to be seized with a longing to do so ; but he was quite contented for that evening to take them on trust from Lena Morden, who was so evidently ready to take far weightier matters on trust from himself. That readiness was an excellent thing in woman, in

Rothery Selfert's opinion, no less than in that of the Reverend Albert Carfax, and perhaps of some small proportion of the male sex generally.

Later on in the evening he asked her to play for him, and sat watching her as she did so with a face of such grave solemnity that Mr. Morden, looking upon him, was lost in wonder that a man so intellectual, and dwelling in such an earthly and opulent Olympus of his own, could take the trouble to feign an interest in a pianoforte at all. As to any interest in the performer abstracted from the music-stool, Mr. Morden was wholly incapable of discernment; having already rubbed his mental eyes into a state of temporary blindness, in a vain attempt to clear their vision.

Rothery Selfert had only seen this girl three times, and had not hitherto believed himself to be a man likely to be carried away by a gust of passion. As a matter of fact, he felt no passion at all in the matter; but had, nevertheless, almost made up his mind to

select Lena Morden for his wife. There had been growing on him of late years a consciousness that his life was in some measure defective, compared to that of other men. He did not want gusts of passion, having spent a quarter of a century or so in keeping clear of such things; but he knew that he was not a happy or contented man, and had often wondered whether the incompleteness, which made itself felt, was due to his separation from all domestic interests. Before this girl had come in his way, he had almost resolved that he would make the experiment of changing his life entirely in this respect, and had very little apprehension of any danger to be incurred by doing so. Of course no man could insure himself against the possibility of his wife bringing shame upon him, but he had sufficient confidence in his own powers of selection to think such a calamity at least improbable, and in no other way did he believe that any woman could use the

position of his wife to compromise his happiness.

His mind, notwithstanding the distractions of Juries' Qualification Bills and bishops' leases, was in this state when he first saw Lena Morden, and it seemed to him at once that there was exactly the sort of woman he had been looking for. No particular sort of woman had, as a matter of fact, been up till then before his mind, as his experience was hardly large enough to enable him to piece together an ideal from it, but the impression produced upon him by Lena Morden was that there had been such an ideal, and that here at last was its realisation. If this is not falling in love, it is as promising a substitute for that good old-fashioned process as anything which a man with Rothery Selfert's views of humanity is likely to experience.

Lena Morden played Chopin and Beethoven at Mr. Selfert's request, without in the least suspecting what the solemnity of Mr. Selfert's gaze concealed, only too sensible

that it was better to play Chopin and Beethoven to Mr. Selfert, than to be compelled to swallow the acerbities of Mrs. Morden which that dignified presence suppressed. Had she been able to foresee all the results of her evening's performance, Mrs. Morden's acerbities, by such a comparison, would not have seemed quite so likely to stick in her throat.

It is difficult and dangerous to say of any woman that she is ever quite unaware of the fact, when any man, however unlikely in himself to have done so, regards her as his possible wife. There is an undefinable, almost imperceptible something in the manner—a tone, almost inaudible, in the voice—a glance, almost imaginary, in the eye—which the sternest male resolution may strive in vain to hide, and which the weakest specimen of feminine discernment never fails to detect. Lena Morden's perception of the fact was not yet so real that she was compelled to fasten her attention upon it, or decide in what manner it must be dealt with;

but she was dimly conscious of a wonderful reason that might exist for this man's presence by her side, for the thoughtfulness with which he tried to ward off annoyances from her, for the pleasure—real or assumed—which he took in everything she said or did. Being sadly in need of a mortal god, she had already begun to wonder whether she could believe that this man possessed any of the attributes of divinity. She knew he was wise; she saw no reason why he should not be good. That other girls looked for, and were content with something that was not wisdom or goodness merely, she knew very well; but she was inclined to think that it was not until after marriage that such a discovery would come to her. Yet she was a girl who knew the value of her own future; and as she sat playing Beethoven to Rothery Selfert, she had by no means made up her mind that Rothery Selfert's wisdom or goodness were enough to satisfy her. He had not said a word to her that evening yet that might not

have been published in the next morning's paper, and she felt no fear of his doing so when they were left alone together, not long before she knew he must leave to catch the last train back to London. She even stopped playing, and closed the piano without any feeling that it might be dangerous to give him the opportunity of breaking the silence.

"I trust you will not think that the interest I take in your future is intrusive," he said, with the formality he found it so difficult to get rid of, "but may I venture to hope that the stay I understand you are to make with your uncle is not repugnant to you?"

"No, not repugnant," she answered frankly enough, thinking at the same time that repugnance was rather too hard a term to use about her cousin Frank's "childishness;" "but there are reasons which do not exactly make the prospect pleasant. I suppose most people have to put up with some unpleasantness occasionally, and there is nothing more than that."

"I am sorry there should be so much," said Mr. Selfert, "whatever the 'reasons' may be. Would you forgive my asking you if there is any man likely to be fortunate enough to be allowed to put an end to the unpleasantness?"

A man can hardly be blamed for trying to make sure that there is no obstacle in the way, before he takes such a step as Rothery Selfert contemplated, and Lena did not see how she could very well refuse to answer the question; but she would very much have preferred it if she could have referred him to Florry for an answer.

"No," she answered, flushing slightly, "there is not. I do not think the unpleasantness will be put an end to in the way you are speaking of."

She did not wish that he should think her silly and girlish enough to affect to misunderstand what was so very intelligible, and felt almost a contempt for her weakness in blushing as she answered. A man



like Rothery Selfert must, she thought, see quite enough that was despicable in any woman without that.

"I think you were right in answering me plainly," he said, still more confirmed in his opinion that she was less infirm of mind than most of the other young women with whom he had come in contact. "Then there is nothing to prevent me from saying what I hope may put you out of the reach of anything unpleasant for the future. I think you might reasonably expect as much as that, if you became my wife."

At any rate, there was nothing childish in such a proposal as this, and though Lena was rather startled by the suddenness of its development, it was not at all out of keeping with what she had led herself to expect from a man of Mr. Selfert's mental superiority. It was difficult to imagine him suing for love as her cousin Frank had done; and in her then exalted state of mind, she would almost have looked upon it as drag-

ging God's image in the dust had he so sued. She had not at all realised how close and dear a thing a husband must be, at any rate occasionally, to his wife, and felt that she could be quite contented to carry on her worship at a reasonable distance. Yet she hesitated a little, not being quite sure of the exact distance which would ultimately be agreed on between them, or indeed, of the nature of the worship which would be expected of her.

"Perhaps you have not considered this yet," he said, after waiting a little for an answer, "and would like a day or two to do so. I will say nothing of this to any one else until you are ready to answer me; and you can keep it to yourself, or not, just as you think best. Remember that I will do my best to insure your happiness, and that I shall find my own happiness in doing so."

"You are very good," she stammered, feeling quite incapable of choosing words or phrases, as he could do, and with a kind

of idea that the very inability was another proof of her own inferiority to him.

“I hope you will always think so,” said Mr. Selfert, with a grim smile, having certainly not hitherto indulged the belief that his goodness was his strong point, though he decidedly meant that his wife should be of that opinion. “Perhaps there is nothing more that I can say just now, except to repeat that I fully believe that what I propose will be for the happiness of both of us. I will wait a day or two for an answer, and hope you will try to make it a favourable one. Would it be too much to ask you to let Mr. Morden know that I am waiting to say good-night?”

Lena felt it a relief to escape from the room, and allowed her father to despatch his guest unassisted, hoping that the ardour of her lover would not cause him to forget his promise of maintaining his reserve for the present. She need have been under no apprehension in the matter, as Rothery Selfert

had not the slightest idea of taking any such inferior animal as Mr. Morden into his confidence until the revelation became absolutely necessary. In his view, his marriage was a thing that concerned himself alone—his wife, perhaps, in a secondary degree—and he was not sure that it would not have been a wiser dispensation of Providence had the world been composed of isolated units altogether. Ties of paternity and relationship became, he was inclined to think, mere cumbrous superfluities as soon as a certain age was reached, and the wants of infancy ceased to be clamorous.

He was, however, sufficiently in earnest in the matter to be quite sure, as soon as he got home, that he had not done anything injudicious, and grew almost enthusiastic as he contemplated the vision of the future peaceful serenity of his married life. He was not old enough to be indifferent to such personal attractions as those he intended to make his own, although he had carefully

eschewed feminine beauty for many years past, and the bright mystery of Lena's eyes, to say nothing of the soft clear complexion and supple figure, was very attractive even to his matured taste. There was, besides, he fancied, just the fitting amount of intellect and the most desirable kind of morality, and he did not think it probable that a very large percentage of young women combined these estimable qualities in the same degree. Classifying women generally, he considered that the number of those who deserved to be placed in the first class was small; and as the idea that any one who was not in the first class could ever become Rothery Selfert's wife was monstrous to him, he felt considerable complacency in the reflection that he was at last secured against such a contingency. On the whole, he fell asleep, after taking a digestive pill which had become habitual to him, with more satisfaction in the prospect of the remainder of his life than he had experienced for a long time. It did

strike him, however, that it might become annoying when there was somebody from whom it would be well to conceal such personal trifles as digestive pills for the future.

## CHAPTER XI.

STARTING with the premises that there are, roughly speaking, say half a million more women than men in the British Isles, and that some men certainly, perhaps the majority, risk a proposal more than once in their lives, it would be a curious calculation to discover what is the average number of *bonâ fide* offers which an ordinary young woman may look forward to during the debateable years of her life. Whatever the number may be, Lena Morden had undoubtedly already enjoyed more than her fair share, and ought to have known how to set about making her mind up on this particular occasion ; but as

she could not in the least understand the motives which had induced Rothery Selfert to follow in the track of his predecessors, she found a difficulty in deciding whether they were such as would make what he offered her worthy her acceptance. She was almost equally perplexed with her own state of mind, and only knew it was different to anything she had before experienced on similar occasions. If the only real sort of love was such as Florry felt for the staff she had chosen for herself, Lena was quite certain that she did not love the man who had come to her in such a novel way. But then she remembered that he had never asked her to love him at all ! unless such a condition was implied in the remark he had made about the happiness of both. Notwithstanding this omission, she thought she could learn to do so, in her own peculiar way. Of course she did not expect that the affection of such a man as Mr. Selfert would partake of the gushing extravagance which she had found



so objectionable in her cousin Frank ; but as he could have no other inducement to choose her as his wife, she thought she might assume that his love, which would be of course of the most superior description, would be given to her.

Not a word had been said to " Catherine" by her attached brother which would lead her mind to a suspicion of the truth, but Catherine had more discernment than was possessed by her husband, and had formed her own conclusions on the matter. Consequently, Lena was left very much to herself during the following day, after Mr. Morden had made his daily escape to the Treasury, and wandered aimlessly about the house and garden, trying to realise to herself what manner of man Rothery Selfert was, and what a life spent by his side would be like.

Frank Morden, who, in consequence of the contemplated arrangement, of course knew the day of his cousin's return, turned

up with rather a shamefaced look in the afternoon, having perhaps found even Miss Deacle's society beginning to pall upon him. He had forgotten all about his expectation of being cured, and came back to singe all that was left of his wings with a perfect greediness for the flame.

"So you are coming to us for a little!" he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness, when the difficulty of the first salutation was over.

"I believe that is what papa intends," said Lena, hesitating a little as she remembered that the proposed arrangement would probably have to be modified, should she decide upon becoming Mrs. Selfert.

"Oh, it's a settled thing!" said the moth, exulting in its coming tortures. "You can't imagine how we're all looking forward to it. This is Friday—I suppose you won't be able to manage the move to-morrow?"

Lena had a keen sense of the ridiculous, and was almost inclined to laugh at the absurdity of the situation.

"I dare say you'll get on very well without me a little longer. What have you been doing with yourself all the last month?"

"Oh, working," said Frank, ignoring the relaxation Miss Deacle had provided for him, and being ungrateful enough at that moment to wish he had never set eyes upon Lizzie's exuberant charms. "I suppose I mustn't ask you if anybody's been trying to make love to you down there?"

"Making love" was an expression which Lena always thought particularly odious, but it was just the kind of thing she expected from Frank. She felt certain that Mr. Selfert would never have used such a horrible phrase, any more than he would have done the thing itself—as Frank did it. "Manifesting affection" would be the nearest approach to such a thing Mr. Selfert could ever be expected to accomplish.

Something in her look showed her displeasure, but Frank misinterpreted it, of course.

"You don't mean to say 'yes?' You haven't let anybody come between us yet, surely?" he said, with quite unaffected indignation.

"You are more childish than ever, I think," said the girl with magnificent contempt. "How can you dare to talk about people coming '*between us*,' after what I told you?"

"Then there has," said the lynx-eyed young idiot ungrammatically, being quite able to understand the drift of an evasive answer. "I don't suppose you have ever taken the trouble to remember that you have been trifling with my happiness all the time?"

"Trifling!" repeated Lena in high indignation, but feeling almost directly that it was impossible to expect reason from such a male baby. "You have no right to say such things, Frank," she said more seriously. "I have always told you plainly that I shall never marry you, and it would be absurd that

you should make a disturbance about my marrying anybody else."

"Then there is somebody else?" he repeated sullenly, as if he was determined to get a confession out of her.

Up to that moment, Lena had not made up her mind whether there was somebody else or not, and had certainly not intended to say anything to her cousin about her deliberations.

"Yes," she said almost solemnly, "there is. I am going to marry Mr. Selfert, but I do not wish it spoken about for a day or so."

"Mr. Selfert!" almost shouted Frank, scarcely believing his own ears. "Why, he's old enough to be your father!"

"I think that's my own concern," said Lena, with a little scorn on her lip. Were not the excellences which had been offered for her acceptance such as to put all considerations of age or personal experience beside the question? "At any rate, he has

asked me to marry him, and I mean to do so."

"I never heard such d——d nonsense in my life," said Frank, who was getting angry. "Why, he's almost your uncle! I don't believe you can do it, to begin with—there's something in the Prayer-book about it, I know."

"You had better go away, if you want to insult me," said Lena with dignity. "I did not think you were so unreasonable."

"Of course I'll go away," answered the outraged lover. "A man can't help a rough word or so, you know. I can tell you I feel like rough words, but I'll go away, of course. That's the best thing I can do, I suppose."

"I think it is," said Lena coolly, who did not at all consider the apology sufficient, "if that's all you have to say. I dare say you'll get over the feelings you talk about before very long."

"Get over!" repeated Frank, wondering

what would succeed where Miss Deacle's charms had failed. "It doesn't matter to you what I do, of course, but I'm not likely to do much good. I suppose you won't come and stay with us now, then?" he added lamely, by way of an after-thought, remembering that an intelligible account of his mission would be required of him.

Lena thought that, in deference to her new prospects, she might probably be spared that humiliation, and signified as much to her disconcerted suitor, who returned to town with a firmer conviction than ever that he was the most ill-treated being on the face of the earth. It was a positive insult to be what he called "thrown over" for a man a good deal more than twice his age, and he hardly realised even yet that his cousin really meant to carry out her threat. There is perhaps no conviction more widely spread among men of from twenty to thirty, than the theory that any feminine love for a middle-aged object must be a sham. In the

cases which do occur of such an object being well on the wrong side of fifty, the feminine love (seen from the said youthful standpoint) assumes the still stronger form of a revolting manifestation of hypocrisy. Let it be left to the feminine readers of these lines to say at what age the male being becomes incapable of inspiring what is generally signified by the much-abused word ; certain it is that as each lustre of a man's life passes away, his tendency to push the limit farther on increases. It may be assumed, at any rate, that Lena Morden would not consciously have committed herself to any such sham as that denounced.

Of course it was necessary to speak to her father of her determination, and Lena thought it would be best to do so even before her suitor himself was told of his success.

"Papa," she said, getting him alone into the garden after dinner, "I am afraid you have been having a lot of worry about me?"



“My dear,” said Mr. Morden, feeling that he had been worried about most things with which he had been concerned, “it doesn’t matter.” He laid his hand on her shoulder, more as if feeling for a support than bestowing a caress, and looked feebly back to make sure that he was not being watched from the enemy’s camp within. “It doesn’t matter at all.”

“I know it doesn’t matter, in a way,” answered the girl, touching his hand with her own as if to show that she understood him, “but I am very sorry for it, all the same. Now I am going to frighten you—you mustn’t call out.”

“My dear,” said Mr. Morden again, trying to rub his eyes (metaphorically speaking) until he induced a sort of mental ophthalmia, “I won’t be frightened if I can help it.” With a mental reservation in his own mind as to the effect produced by Mrs. Morden in her own special department.

“It sounds rather absurd, I’m afraid,” said

Lena, with half a blush and half a laugh, "but Mr. Selfert wants me to marry him. At least he said so, last night."

Mr. Morden was so utterly incapable of guessing what his daughter's views of such a proposal might be that he did not think it wise to hazard any opinion on the subject. It seemed to him, of course, a good thing in itself for a girl to be taken up with the Olympus of men like Rothery Selfert, and yet he was so painfully conscious that the Olympus might not be an Olympus at all, if his daughter was not obliged to look at it from such an unfortunate level. So he said nothing, being perhaps afraid of transgressing her injunction by calling out.

"This is the letter I am going to send him," continued Lena, who had succeeded, after an infinity of anxiety and deliberation, in producing something which she was able to contemplate the possibility of submitting to her suitor's criticism. She was by no means contented with it, but reflected that

if she was unable to write her intended husband a letter, she was certainly unfitted to become his wife.

“DEAR MR. SELFERT,

“I feel that I ought to give you an answer as soon as possible, and do not wish you to think that I am unable to make up my mind on such a matter. What you propose does not seem impossible to me, and therefore I suppose that I am justified in accepting your offer. It sounds almost presumptuous for me to say that I hope you did not speak hastily or unadvisedly, but that is the feeling I have on the subject. As to my happiness for the future, I would rather feel that it was in your hands than my own.

“Yours sincerely,

“LENA MORDEN.”

Mr. Morden played a little nervously

with the envelope before giving it back to his daughter, looking as if he doubted whether she were old enough to be trusted with such a perilous document.

"You are quite sure you are right, my dear?" he said, wondering how much responsibility was generally assumed by fathers in such matters.

"I don't know his address," said Lena, who did not by any means always think it necessary to answer her father's observations.

"Paper Buildings, Temple, is all I know," said Mr. Morden, relieved to find that he was not expected to have a voice in the matter. "I don't know where he lives the least in the world."

"He ought to get it as soon as possible," said Lena. "I wish you'd post it for me to-night."

The direction was added, and the letter posted, although Mr. Morden did not feel at all sure that by going to the lawyer's

chambers, it would not come under the surveillance of Brooking with the rest of Mr. Selfert's more professional correspondence.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE only person who felt no surprise whatever at Lena Morden being willing to accept such a companion as Rothery Selfert for the remainder of her life was, perhaps, Rothery Selfert himself; who, though he was quite satisfied with the humility of her reply, would have felt his estimate of himself from an objective point of view considerably upset had its tenor been different. He was gracious enough to assure her, on more than one subsequent occasion, that he was quite incapable of any such hastiness as that which she appeared (very prudently) to believe possible. It might have been possible with other men, but not, he assured her (with an honest belief

in his own words), in the case of Rothery Selfert.

Lena, who was really blinded by her belief in the man's brain and manifest mental superiority, saw nothing in his language which could be called arrogant or ridiculous. There was much to which she was not accustomed, but she was able to convince herself, as often as anything ought to have jarred upon her ears, that the apparent dissonance only owed its existence to her defective hearing, and set herself resolutely to work to educate her ear to the high standard which the music of the future seemed to require.

Of course the projected transplanting of such a weed to the London incumbent's domestic soil was at once dismissed from everybody's recollection, and the bride-elect was treated by all, even (with a grim imitation of courtesy) by Mrs. Morden, with something of the respect which was due to the exaltation which was in store for her.

Nor was the time of her lifting up to be unduly postponed, as the barrister was anxious to get through the mysterious embarrassments of the honeymoon before Brooking compelled him to return to his chambers for the winter. The precise date, by dint of consultations with Brooking on the one hand, and references to the lady's trousseau requirements on the other, was at last settled; and, thanks to the expectant bridegroom's discretion in not making either his faults or his excellences too cheap till they had been taken for better or worse, Lena saw her wedding-day approach without the slightest misgiving as to the wisdom of her choice, or the uncertainty of the future into which she was about to plunge. "*Omne ignotum pro magnifico;*" and perhaps, if enlightenment never came, the imaginary magnificence would do quite as well as the real, and would certainly have the advantage of being more easily met with by those who search.



It was a quiet wedding enough, neither the bridegroom nor bride rejoicing in that particular form of parade which is more generally considered essential to a young lady's peace of mind on so disturbing an occasion, and was not even graced by the presence of all the bride's immediate relations.

Frank, having now not a particle of wing left to get singed, was almost divine in his wrath and contempt for the iniquitous proceeding he was unable to stop, and refused to come near the house which afforded shelter to the wrongdoers. He wrote a long letter to his cousin at least once a week (though, fortunately for her, it was only occasionally that he was sufficiently satisfied with his production to send it to her), breathing the spirit of manly indignation and revolted love which such perfidy had of course excited; but perhaps even a more satisfactory vent for these essential but inconvenient sentiments was found in

the society which had lately become almost necessary to him, and Miss Deacle's gentle (and well-developed) bosom received a great deal of the froth and fury which inevitably ensued upon the literary efforts to which he so often had recourse. There was a delightful feeling, too, as if of immorality, about such outpourings, which was novel to the sufferer, and impressed him with an idea of the reality of the anguish which had driven him to such extreme lengths. It was a pity that so innocuous a violation of the laws of etiquette as that in which Frank had indulged, under Lizzie's patronage and guidance, should ever have failed to satisfy his sympathetic cravings!

Lizzie, however, had begun to fancy that her young friend would not long be contented with paying for her dinners at Richmond and the Crystal Palace.

Whatever the nature of his intimacy with Miss Deacle had been or was to be, Frank had been discreet enough, in its earlier

stages, to keep the knowledge of that young lady's existence a secret from those to whom his leisure hours ought more properly to be given; but he had grown more rash as matters progressed, and had begun rather to glory in the disturbance which the suspicion of his misconduct caused at home. Lizzie had not been always as discreet as on the occasion when she hid herself from the eyes of the presumed "governor" in the refreshment-room, and envelopes with the loudest of monograms, and directed in a hand that almost spoke to the anxious maternal eye, had found their way more than once to the parental roof. Frank was even rather proud of these trophies of his success, and received a gentle remonstrance on the subject with an independence that was itself almost a consolation to him.

"If I can't have my own letters here, I can have them sent to Chaffin's, of course," he had said with indignation that was partly real.

"Nobody wants to interfere with your correspondence, Frank, you know very well," answered his mother, who knew, of course, of her son's disappointment, and treated him with much consideration in consequence; "only I hope you don't get letters here or anywhere else that you're ashamed of."

As a matter of fact, Frank was not so much ashamed of Lizzie and her gorgeous envelopes, as he would have been a few months back, but, nevertheless, he was hardly inclined to talk about them to his mother.

"I don't mean to be ashamed of anything," he said brusquely, walking out of the room.

Of course his mother could not understand the feelings of a man who had passed through experiences such as his!

He was quite convinced, however, that Lizzie could, and certainly that young lady had enjoyed better opportunities than the clergyman's wife for studying the phenomena of male eccentricity, from other points of vantage than the bar at the avuncular eating-

house. Frank knew, of course, that he had been stooping in the gutter, but then he more than half believed that he had discovered a pearl! She was certainly a finer woman than his "cousin, spider-hearted," with really quite a magnificent *torso*, and a complexion which Frank had assured himself beyond all manner of doubt was not painted—at any rate when it was within his reach. As to her general effect, he remembered with triumph that young Danebury had raised his hat the other day with almost an expression of reverence when he met Frank with his fair charge at the Zoological Gardens one Sunday. Danebury had been at school with Frank, and was eating his dinners for the bar, and Frank felt quite certain that Danebury would not have raised his hat unless impressed with the belief that the lady he saw with his friend was—well, *was* a lady. Since Danebury's unfortunate tribute of respect, Frank's pride in his successful search for consolation, and his belief in the

goodness of Lizzie's "form," had, beyond a doubt, become unduly exalted.

It is not to be supposed that Lizzie, who took such a natural interest in Frank's belongings, had been at all reticent about her own. Long before the stage just described had been reached, Frank was able to address letters so as to find Miss Deacle elsewhere than at the eating-house, mention of which had come to be tacitly avoided between them, and knew that his pearl resided in a little street off the New Road, with Mr. and Mrs. Deacle. People of the highest respectability were Mr. and Mrs. Deacle, according to Lizzie's account, but she did not pretend that their respectability was of such a nature as to render her services at her uncle's place of business at all incongruous or painful to their feelings. Mr. Deacle was, she said, connected with the *Echo*, which sounded well at first, until it was explained that his particular department was concerned principally with the little red carts in which that valuable

publication is conveyed, by special express, to the hands of the millions who are always hungering for its perusal. Frank did not think it likely that a person of Mr. Deacle's age and respectability actually drove any of the little red carts himself, except in cases of sudden emergency; but, nevertheless, he felt sufficiently uncomfortable whenever such a vehicle passed him in Lizzie's company, unless the tender age of the driver was such as to defy apprehension. The exigencies of the *Echo's* sale might not allow the little red carts to stop in order to satisfy the domestic responsibilities of the driver, but Frank thought that such a *rencontre* might nevertheless be attended with embarrassing consequences. Lizzie's ideas of propriety, however, though peculiar, were very strict; and she had lately come to the conclusion that her aristocratic friendship was more likely to become a source of advantage to her if some such meeting could be brought about.

"I suppose you're ashamed to come inside?" she said, when Frank had seen her as far as Gotha Street, New Road, about nine o'clock one evening. "That's where I live, you know."

Frank, as has been seen, did not at all like being told he was ashamed, and liked it no better from Lizzie than he had done from his mother.

"I'm not ashamed at all," he protested, trying to believe that he was speaking the truth. "Only I don't quite see what good it would do. I suppose your father and mother have never heard of me in their lives?"

"Where do you suppose they fancy I go in the evenings, then?" said Lizzie, who had not, however, always been in the habit of giving her parents a strict account of the hours she devoted to relaxation. "Of course they know I'm not alone all the time, or I shouldn't be able to get away."

If Lizzie meant that she was safer in Frank's society than when left to her own



sweet will, she undoubtedly spoke the truth, but Frank was not quite prepared for the apparent stringency of Mr. Deacle's domestic regulations. He saw that the girl wished that he should become known, so far as his personal appearance was concerned, to some others of her own family, but was too unsophisticated to see the real reason, wondering only whether she thought that the general respectability of his outer man was such as would impress her natural guardians with a belief in the safety and propriety of such a connection. But he certainly would not have gone inside at Lizzie's request had not the door opened, and a fat—a very fat—old lady, who might easily have been the wife of such an *employé* of the *Echo* as has been described, appeared on the scene to add her entreaties to those of her daughter.

“Won't Mr. Frank come in, Liz?” she asked of the young lady, whom she had probably, twenty or thirty years before, resembled very closely. “She always speaks

of you as Mr. Frank," she continued, turning to the unfortunate young man who had not been resolute enough to escape; "and I don't know no other name to call you. But name or no name, I hope he'll come inside."

Any man with ordinary strength of mind might still have fled; but Frank hesitated, having in his mind the dread of Lizzie's displeasure, and in another minute the door had closed, leaving him on the other side.

"Just one glass of brandy hot," said the hospitable old lady.

It was some comfort that the Echo *employé* was not present to do the honours of Gotha Street as well as Lizzie's mamma, but even in her presence Frank did not succeed in making himself thoroughly at home.

Frank spent at least an half hour sitting opposite the fat old woman, and drinking his brandy and water, not liking to outrage Lizzie's feelings by making too abrupt a departure. Then Mrs. Deacle, looking like a sack that had burst at the bottom without

letting out its contents, waddled out of the room, and left the—well, the lovers—for a few minutes alone.

“I wonder what the young lady down at Kew would say if she could see you sitting here!” said Lizzie, laughing.

Frank was past laughing by this time, but finished his brandy and water with a gulp, and declared that he didn't care a d—n what the young lady at Kew would say. He wondered, as he said it, whether such an infliction as he had been undergoing was the penalty generally paid for society like Miss Deacle's. Nevertheless, there was nothing in the girl herself which was distasteful to him. He was still inclined to believe in the pearl, but the gutter was so extremely nasty!

“I expect father'll be in directly,” said Lizzie.

This was too much for Frank, who felt that nothing more could be reasonably expected of him that night.

“Upon my word I must be off,” he

said, getting up in some alarm. "Good-night."

"Good-night," said Lizzie, putting up her face to be kissed in the most natural manner possible. Frank had no objection to the operation in the abstract, but he could not help feeling that there was something ominous in the very matter-of-fact incidents of this particular salutation. Where so much was given, was there not a danger that something would be required?

"And about Saturday afternoon," said Lizzie.

"Oh, I'll write a line," answered Frank, feeling that if nothing more was required of him than Saturday afternoons, the payment for the brandy and water, and the rest of his entertainment, including Lizzie's kisses, would not be so very difficult after all.

### CHAPTER XIII.

“MY VERY DEAREST LENA,

“Now that you have been Mrs. Selfert a *whole* week, I daresay you will be able to spare five minutes to read a letter from Bertie and myself—at least, I mean from myself alone, for Bertie will send no message except his very kindest love, and says you won’t want to be bothered with that. I want you to write and tell me as much as you can, just as if you were back at dear old Lydcombe talking to me, about the man who has been lucky enough to marry the dearest girl in the world. Of course I was talking nonsense when I said he must be old, and I remember you were almost angry with me

for thinking so. A man may be any age he likes if he is really nice, and I always thought, until after we were engaged, that Bertie was at least ten years older than me, although he never wore a beard at all until after we were married. I am afraid this sounds silly, but it would be absurd for me to scratch anything out when I was writing to dear old Lena, especially as by this time I hope that you have learnt to be silly yourself, sometimes. I always thought it would do you good to forget to be sensible for a little.

“Perhaps Mr. Selfert likes you to be sensible when you talk to him, as he is so clever ; but then you have had a week to talk in. I know Bertie and I had ever so many things to settle at first, but we had nearly finished by the first fortnight. I mean the things that had to be *regularly* talked over. And then Mr. Selfert cannot tell you about his profession, as Bertie did, because of course you can’t understand law, though I’m sure you’re clever enough to, if you tried. I

suppose you have had to settle about your house, and it will be so nice to see you in one of your own, as I hope I shall some day. You will be much grander people than we are, you know; and I am so glad that you are going to have lots of money, because *it all helps*.

“Everything is very quiet here, as usual. We have got a new curate coming next month, and Mr. Roberts is going away. I think he must really have *cared for* you—do you know?—because he looked so angry when we told him about it, and next Sunday his nose began to bleed in church, just as he was going to read the Lessons. At least he said afterwards it was his nose, but at any rate he had to go into the vestry. Bertie says he has often seen young men at Cambridge walk out like that, holding their handkerchiefs to their faces, when they were tired of chapel. I shall begin to talk nonsense again, if I don’t stop. Do find time to write soon to your affectionate

“FLORRY.”

This letter, which was addressed to Mrs. Rothery Selfert, Grand Hotel, Ilfracombe, was the first in which Lena had seen her new title on paper, and it was difficult at first to get rid of the idea that all envelopes so directed were intended for the perusal of Mr. Rothery Selfert in the first instance. Not that her husband, even in the earliest flush of honeymoon assimilation, was likely to dream of claiming such a privilege; for Mr. Rothery Selfert had as little idea of making his wife's thoughts his, as he had of sharing his own superior mind with his wife. The element of domesticity, which he had hitherto considered wanting in his character, could very well, he considered, be supplied, without going to any such extreme length as that. But even this, in his opinion, could not be properly developed during such an abnormal and transitional period as that which the customs of society were just then requiring him to spend at Ilfracombe.

As to the process of assimilation, it had



not perhaps progressed very fast; certainly not as fast as Florry represented it to have taken place in her own case. Of course this, again, was to be put down to the superior nature of the bridegroom's mind, and Lena was really amused at Florry's suggestion that all the regular topics of conversation between them had by this time become exhausted. Exhausted they were not likely soon to be, but she did think occasionally it was time that some of them were opened, being still almost as much in the dark as to the riches of her husband's intellect, as she had been the day he first proposed to take her future happiness under his care. So far, his provision for her happiness had been very much what he would have made for a doll which he supposed to have been miraculously endued with an unusually large appetite; and though he had not shown any resentment or ill-temper, he had certainly displayed considerable surprise on one or two occasions when she had timidly attempted to show that she would like him to

take an interest in her thoughts as well as her digestion. His own letters came for him every morning, almost in packets, being of too important a nature to be suppressed during the sacred month, as are occasionally those of lesser men; and Lena could not help wondering, as she saw him sit engrossed with them for a couple of hours after breakfast, whether the time would ever come when she would be of sufficient use to him to be able, at any rate, to sort those voluminous piles of correspondence. In her anxiety to hasten the assimilating process, she would have given him poor Florry's epistle to read, had she not remembered that Florry's name was at least as unknown to her husband as the signatures of even the attorneys most favoured by Brooking were to her. Of Brooking she had already heard, that official having had, as has been said, almost as much to do with fixing the wedding day as she herself.

"I suppose you would like to go out for a

drive this afternoon, or something of that sort, wouldn't you?" said Mr. Selfert, who had by this time exhausted his correspondence, and had just commenced on the evening journals of the previous day, which had been sent down specially by Brooking's discretion.

Brooking had evidently studied the subject of honeymoon, and knew that though it is difficult to go in cold blood to a library in search of distraction during such a period, it is one of the easiest things imaginable to take up a paper, without the possibility of laying oneself open to censure, or even to remorse. Consequently, the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Globe* had both been despatched regularly by Brooking for his master's relief, and Lena had been rather surprised by her husband's forethought when she found both those excellent journals lying on the breakfast-table, the very morning after their wedding-day. He certainly passed his newspapers on to her, when he had finished them; but notwith-

standing this, Lena did not feel that their whole resultant effect was to promote conversation.

“Pray don’t think of trying to amuse me, if it bores you to drive about,” said Lena in answer to her husband’s vague suggestion. “I never get tired of sitting on the rocks, and looking at that splendid sea.”

It was quite right that a woman should be so easily pleased, but Mr. Selfert did not himself care so much about looking at the splendid sea, and assured his wife that driving about with her would bore him as little as anything else that was feasible at Ilfracombe. It was true that by so doing his perusal of the London papers would be delayed, as they did not come in till four o’clock, a calamity which did not at first occur to him. Eventually they compromised the matter by deferring their expedition until after the *Times* had arrived, and then drove over to Watermouth Bay, Mr. Selfert

carrying that indispensable product of civilisation in his pocket.

Watermouth Bay was almost as pretty as anything Lena had seen in the neighbourhood of Lydcombe, with a graceful arm of the sea stretching up as if to embrace the castle, whose massive rounded outlines stood boldly up from the bright green sward that ran down almost to the very verge of the water. Lena tried to make a little sketch in her pocket-book of what pleased her in the view, while her husband sat down on the grass to read his *Times*, leaving the carriage to wait a little distance off. He had been uncomfortable all day until that moment had arrived, having a sort of presentiment that there would be something in it of more than ordinary interest, if only because he had put himself in such an out-of-the-way corner of England that it was almost impossible, if anything in the London papers necessitated the writing of a letter, to post one that would be delivered in town next morning.

On this particular day the death of one of the most venerable of the judges who had presided in one of the courts at Westminster for many years, was the first announcement that met his eye.

It was quite understood in well-informed circles that the Attorney-General, who could now claim it as a matter of right, had long had his eye upon the seat thus rendered vacant, and the great arbiter of public feeling did not hesitate to mention that this appointment only wanted formal completion.

The Solicitor-General would of course become Attorney, and the great question was, who would step into the place of the Solicitor-General. Now three names were spoken of by the *Times* as men on whom such an appointment might probably fall, and Rothery Selfert's name was not one of the three.

Lena could not help seeing the frown on her husband's face, as he read over the distasteful paragraph. He had not expected,

and did not expect, that the coveted post would be offered to himself on this occasion. Stonely who was popularly said to have spent over twelve thousand pounds in unsuccessfully-contended elections, had undoubtedly stronger claims upon his party, and Rothery Selfert had already been given to understand that, until Stonely was provided for, no such good fortune would come in his direction. He did not complain of the suggestion as to Stonely. But of the other two names that were mentioned, one was that of a visionary theorist, whose voice was listened to with more respect in the House than in the courts below, and the other that of a man much junior to both, who might possibly, in Rothery Selfert's opinion, be fit for the position in question in another ten years. After his herculean efforts in the matter of the Juries' Bill, it did seem to Rothery Selfert almost a personal slight to express a belief in the possibility of his being postponed to such men as these.

“ Haven’t you found something in the paper to worry you ?” asked Lena, who had not got rid of the idea that such worries, if they existed, should be shared in common, if the assimilation which the visit to Ilfracombe was intended to effect was to attain anything like reality at all.

Notwithstanding such a view, however, she was quite sensible that there were difficulties in the way of her sharing such worries as those which were likely to affect her husband ; and did not make the attempt to carry out her theory with confidence.

The frown on his face was rather deepened than otherwise as he answered her. Any annoyance which reached him was always, in his opinion, doubly intensified when it became visible to the world outside him, a term which now included his wife ; and it was his theory that no unpleasant matters should, if it was possible to avoid it, ever be made the subjects of discussion. Not that he was a man who thought lightly of his troubles,



but he was accustomed to brood over them in silence, and did not wish that such a habit should be interrupted.

“No, no,” he said shortly; “what puts such ideas into your head? Would you like to look at the supplement?”

In default of sharing her husband's thoughts, Lena was compelled to share his paper, but she saw that he was displeased, and wondered whether she had stepped out of a wife's path in showing something of the curiosity with which she regarded the workings of his mind. She found it difficult to bring her thoughts to the chronicle of births, deaths, and marriages which she held in her hand, and putting down the paper, walked down by herself to the water, which was already turning from the transparent violet of twilight to the cold dead opaqueness that it was fain to borrow from a starless sky. It cannot be said that she was actually distressed by being rebuffed as she had been, but she could not repress a gloomy

fancy that it would be of very little use to have married a husband whose thoughts were not as those of the rest of mankind, if all the offspring of his imagination were shut away from her imperfect ken. Except for the empty satisfaction of the thing, she might just as well have married the curate who wanted her to watch him throwing stones at a crow ! At any rate, such a bridegroom as that would have been anxious that she should take an interest in his pursuits.

Mr. Selfert finished the paper with great tranquillity, lighting a cigar to console himself for the want of judgment (and he thought he might say, trustworthy information) displayed by the Jupiter of the press ; and only when he had thoroughly exhausted the leading articles (which he generally read last) did he think it necessary to go in pursuit of his wife. It never occurred to him that anything had been wanting in his manner towards her, or that she had walked away from his

side because it distressed her to remain there without being spoken to. Had anybody told him that he had been harsh and cold, if not absolutely brutal, he would have thought his accuser mad. He had always been told that the supplement of the *Times* was the most interesting part of the paper in a woman's eyes!

He was not so blind, however, as to be unable to perceive that something was amiss when he came up to Lena's side, and saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"Is there anything the matter?" he asked gloomily. In how different a tone had his wife sought to know the reason of the frown on his brow twenty minutes ago!

"Of course not," said Lena bravely, feeling instinctively that anything like complaint in such a matter would only widen the gulf between them. "Isn't it getting late enough to go home?"

Mr. Selfert gave her his arm, that being one of the recognised duties of a bridegroom

in his mind, and they went back to the carriage together. It was too dark of course for him to solace the weariness of the drive back by a second perusal of the paper, but the time was not wholly given to conversation, all the same. Mr. Selfert, who did not think his constitution required him to limit his consumption of nicotine when he was away from London, lit another cigar; and it was a peculiarity of his (which he had already taken an opportunity of inculcating on his wife), that he did not like to be disturbed by conversation when smoking. At such moments the mighty operations of his mind required perfect isolation from the petty cares and turmoil of the outside world.

There was an uneasy feeling in the bride's mind next morning, when she woke to the still novel consciousness of her married life, which she would willingly have forced herself to ignore, had it been possible. Up to the day before, Lena had not felt a single misgiving as to the wisdom of the step she had

taken, with so little ground for the confidence which prompted it. Knowing, as she did, very little of men, and hardly more of women, she had conceived for herself an absolute and perfect theory of both, and made up her mind to find in her own wedded life its complete realisation. The marriage of bodies was in her eyes next to nothing, or only something so far as it was essential to the marriage of souls. It may sound unintelligible to some, and ridiculous to others, to say that her views were Swedenborgian, but so far as it is possible for a woman to coincide with a philosophy of which she knows nothing, such was in truth the case. Only she had breathed into it the pure practicalism which comes from a woman's innocence, and the mystic fancies which disfigure the writings of the philosopher had no part or place in her mind. It was horrible to her instincts to conceive a life in which the thoughts of her husband and herself should for ever remain strange and uninterpreted to each

other, and though she had married without knowing how the interpretation was to be effected, she had never yet doubted that it was sure to follow. The experience of the preceding day had for the first time alarmed the certainty of this conviction. It was not so much that she was distressed at beginning to suspect that the man she had chosen to fancy a god was of as common clay as other men, with assumptions that might almost be ridiculous, and defects perhaps even contemptible. That was little in her eyes, compared with the fear that the man himself, with whatever virtues or faults he possessed, might always remain as personally unknown to her as he had been on the day when they stood before the altar. If it were so, she knew that she could never make herself known to him either. It was in the very nature of her mind to long to bestow its riches upon others, and the thought that this relief might be denied her was enough to make her miserable.

She sat over her breakfast a long time, eating it very slowly, and watching her husband devouring the mental food which the providence of Brooking had furnished by post, with a resolution in her mind to struggle against such a gloomy possibility with all the resources she could command. Whether she possessed tact or not she did not know, but she resolved that she would possess it. Yet her heart almost sank within her, as she looked at the hard solemn face opposite her, which seemed to have grown even more hard and solemn after its nightly petrefaction. Still, if he could not yet allow her to peep into the *arcana* of his mind, she thought it possible that he might at any rate care to know something of hers.

“ I don’t think I showed you this letter—the one I got yesterday,” she said nervously, waiting until he had laid down the paper he was reading, lest her little remark should conflict with weightier matters.

“ No,” he answered, “ you did not show it to

me, certainly. Is there anything you would wish me to read in it?"

It was plain, at any rate, from his tone, that Lena would not be troubled by any attempted surveillance of her correspondence, but in her present state of mind, it was hardly a consolation to know this.

"Oh no!" she said, crimson at the consciousness of being misunderstood, "only it is from Florence Carfax—Mrs. Carfax—my greatest friend almost. And I thought you would understand more about it—her—I suppose I mean about myself—if you were to see what she says. Or I thought you might perhaps be amused by some of it. Pray do not trouble yourself to look at it at all, if you don't feel disposed just now."

She stops, feeling wretchedly aware that her explanation is laboured and inconsistent, and that her husband is looking at her as if they belonged to two different species of wild beasts, caged together by way of a scientific experiment.



Mr. Selfert makes an effort as if he were trying to soothe a sick child, whose whinings and lispings were quite unintelligible to him.

"I am quite disposed, my—my dear," he answers gravely.

He always feels half-ashamed of himself when that endearing appellation, to which he is by no means accustomed, seems necessary, and has formed a sort of resolution to drop it if it does not become easier to his tongue. Still, in the honeymoon, something of the sort can hardly be avoided, unsuitable as it is to his habit of mind! And having thus exerted himself to please his wife by calling her "my dear," he proceeds further to humour her by reading her letter.

How absurd the idea that he "might be amused by some of it" appears to Lena's mind, as she sits watching him turn over the pages! and how she hates herself for having suggested that she expects such a result! She blushes as she remembers a

word or two about his age, and another ridiculous word or two about the disappointed curate. Perhaps her husband would think that what she expected him to be amused at was poor Florry's harmless little joke about Mr. Roberts' exit from church! A joke must be very good indeed to bear passing on like that, with special reference to its excellence, and Lena feels that this particular joke is hardly good enough to convey a very clear idea of the nature of the friendship between Florry and herself.

"Bertie is her husband, of course—a clergyman, I think you said?" remarks Mr. Selfert, trying to take an interest in the minutiae of Florry's domestic joys, and unconscious that they are meant to be in any way a pattern for his own. He really strives to keep any of the contempt he feels out of his voice, but there is a ring of sarcasm in it all the same, which he cannot for the very life of him suppress.

"Yes, a clergyman down in Devonshire," Lena answers mechanically, feeling that her husband does not really care the least whether her friend is married to a clergyman or a chimney-sweeper. "I was staying with them just before—this summer, you know."

"Yes, I remember now," he says, putting down the letter coldly, without any comment on its contents. Nothing is more distasteful to him than "gush" in any shape, and he is inwardly thinking that Bertie must be even a greater fool than the majority of men to have married a woman who could produce such a letter as that.

"She is a little impulsive, perhaps," says Lena, with a loyal feeling that something must be said in favour of her friend; "but she is really one of the few *good* girls I have ever known. So few women have any religious principle at all, I think."

All this is absolutely repellent to Rothery Selfert. The clearest view of religious prin-

ciples he has ever taken is, that it is not expedient to discuss such matters with women, least of all with his own wife ; and he resents almost as an intrusion upon his own moral privacy any language which may seem to invite an enunciation of his personal opinion upon those questions. If his wife means to get to heaven, surely she can manage it without interfering with his own theories on her prospects of doing so !

“I have no doubt she has been quite deserving of your friendship,” he answers, more coldly than ever, “but I should not advise your having recourse to her in any—any religious difficulties which may occur to you. It is far better not to discuss such things with comparative strangers.”

“I certainly never went to her for guidance,” says Lena, a little hurt ; “even when I had no one else to ask, and it is not at all likely that I should do so now, though I do not look upon her as a ‘comparative stranger’ at all. All I meant was, that I

always admired her good qualities, which are much deeper and more real than you would perhaps imagine from reading her letter."

Rothery Selfert signifies, by taking up again the paper which has been laid down during this discussion, that he has had quite enough of the excellences of Mrs. Carfax in particular, and of his wife's confidences in general. As he told Lena when he first proposed that she should come and exert such domestic influence as she was able over him, he had certainly meant that her happiness should be secured as well as his own; but in making such a promise he had much more in his mind the physical necessities of her existence and the unfortunate surroundings of her home, than the possible requirements of her less material desires and aspirations. It seemed to him almost beyond the limits of good taste that a woman to whom so much had been given should weary him with her feeble attempts to secure more. He did not understand

that she was audacious enough to look for identification with him, but he could perceive an assumption of equality which was particularly disagreeable to his mind.

Nevertheless, he had quite expected that there would be something for him to correct in any woman he might select, and had no misgivings as to the ultimate result of his experiment with Lena. The effusiveness and want of restraint to which he objected at present were the natural products, in his mind, of such associations as those of which she boasted in connection with the Devonshire clergyman's wife, and he had no fear that they would not pass off under the healthier influence he was now able to exert. Of the excellence of the material which he had to work upon, although they were nearly at the end of the second week of their honeymoon, he had still no doubt; and quite believed that when the domestic life which he anticipated had fairly commenced, it would

be seen that he was as fortunate among men as she among women.

The bridegroom always considered a couple of hours after breakfast as consecrated to his own personal uses, and his daily correspondence was indeed generally sufficient to demand at least as much of his exclusive attention. Lena was not at all *exigante* in such matters, and had it been necessary for him to sit in a room by himself the whole day writing, would not have dreamed of believing herself slighted or neglected, had he only given her the reality of his society when he professed to do so. On this particular morning, however, she felt chilled and repelled by the manner in which her overtures towards familiarity had been received, and the task of attempting to answer the letter from Devonshire in the spirit in which it was written was particularly distasteful to her. Nevertheless, she did her best to prevent her depression of spirits from being manifest in her reply to it, and flattered herself that she

had succeeded in doing so. The idea of appearing in Florry's eyes afraid of or dissatisfied with her husband was horrible in her mind.

She got hold of the papers her husband had been reading in the course of the day, and managed to discover for herself the cause of the cloud she had seen on his brow when studying the *Times* the evening before. The Vicar of Lydcombe had said of Rothery Selfert that he was a man who looked to becoming Solicitor-General some day, and during her brief engagement she had carefully caught up and digested every word spoken in her hearing respecting the man of whom she thought so much. Of course she knew that it was a great thing to be Solicitor-General, though she had never thought of the secondary honours which would devolve upon her own head if so splendid a dream were realised ; and she could understand that, even in his honeymoon, a man's eyes might well be clouded at the dimming of such a



prospect. As she thought over the matter she began to wonder less that, with all this strong meat for his mind, her husband had found it difficult to turn his attention to such babyish pap as the consideration of her trivial interests and aspirations must be; and before the day closed, she had almost persuaded herself that she had been exacting and unreasonable in feeling any discontent at his reserved and abstracted manner at all. She sat looking wistfully at him after dinner, almost afraid to speak even of ordinary matters lest she should appear to be intruding upon his privacy, and her constraint became after a time manifest even to his pre-engaged faculties of perception. He meant to be perfectly kind to her, if she would only abstain from bothering him about subjects upon which he was not willing to talk; and he was uneasy, after his own fashion, at the idea that she might think that she had a grievance.

“I hope you did not fancy I meant to say anything uncomplimentary of any of your

friends this morning," he said, trying to smile.

"Oh no," answered Lena, who was by this time almost contrite for having thought it possible that Florry's domestic excellences could interest a man who knew it was probable that he might become Solicitor-General at some future day. "Besides, I should like you to say uncomplimentary things if you feel them. I would much rather know what you really think than—than have to guess at it."

She felt that there was a difficulty about explaining her meaning, and hesitated as she made the attempt. It would not do to imply that she thought all the workings of so great a mind fit subject-matter for sacrilegious conjecture and unlicensed curiosity.

"If my thoughts had seemed to me unpleasant for you to listen to," said Mr. Selfert, "I certainly should not have spoken of them. If two people are to live happily together, it is absolutely necessary that they

should know—both of them—when to hold their tongues.”

A warning that might with advantage have been deferred till the honeymoon was over, though the speaker was in reality only glorying in his own infallible judgment and self-control, and did not at the moment intend to hold those qualities out for his wife's imitation.

Lena, however, did not doubt about putting the latter construction upon his words, and grew crimson with vexation as she accepted the rebuke which she had schooled herself into believing that she deserved.

“I know that I often speak without thinking sufficiently,” she said with difficulty, humbling herself as it were in the dust before the deified being she had chosen to worship. “But do not think it necessary to be silent about anything for my sake. I had so much rather know what you really think—even when you wish to find fault.”

The deity was still dissatisfied, notwithstanding the incense of adulation. He did not like the sensation of being granted permission to criticise his wife's peculiarities as he pleased, and felt that it was necessary to say something which should convey to her clearly that he meant to reserve his own mind—or at any rate, the greater part of it—for his own peculiar use and gratification. It had always appeared to him that the gentleman who has become famous by the azure tint of his beard was more than justified in wishing to exclude his wife from one chamber at least in his house, and that the verdict of posterity upon his marital indiscretions was at any rate hasty.

“I do not think you quite understand me,” he said slowly. “My meaning is, that no man's thoughts—and I should think no woman's—are always fit to be communicated to any other person. It is healthy, in my judgment, for the mind to learn to rest entirely on itself in many matters—perhaps in

most. There should, of course, be confidences between man and wife—and I hope that between us there will be many—but it would be a mistake to think that all the little eccentricities of the imagination would be the better for being shared with somebody else. I am sure that you will not misunderstand the intention with which I say this.”

Lena saw that he meant to avoid any appearance of unkindness, and was not so much discouraged by the enunciation of this rather unsympathetic philosophy, as she had been the day before by its practical illustration. It was something, at any rate, to have got at some of her husband's opinions, unpromising as they made the prospect of getting at the remainder. If she was not to be allowed to peep behind the curtain, she was at least allowed to inspect the machinery which drew it. And there were to be confidences too; though she could not help wondering of what nature those confidences

would be. It was something to be quite sure that, whatever form they might take, they would never be such as to endanger the health of either his mind or hers.

## CHAPTER XIV.

MR. MORDEN the clergyman, who has been mentioned as not having made even as good a fight of it with the world as his brother the Treasury clerk had done, was the incumbent of a large district somewhere up to the north-east of Islington, called in the maps Lord's-end, and being indeed one of the most remote spots to which the spiritual arm of the metropolis reached. It was by no means a mass of dirt and ignorance and precocious depravity like the ordinary East-end parishes, which seem from the railway to consist principally of candle-factories and gas-works, being indeed more what the house-agents call a "residential" district; but those who there

resided were principally small tradesmen from the dirtier parts of London, who were themselves more godly than cleanly in their ways, and furnished a congregation whose devotional warmth it was (especially in summer time) impossible to ignore. Sophy Morden, Frank's elder and only sister, had some excuse for declaring herself dissatisfied with the form in which the rites of the church were performed at St. Jude's, and in attaching herself to an edifice more Anglican in its views, which was barely accessible by railway from Lord's-end station in time for the morning service. Even to the incumbent himself the whole tone of Lord's-end was so distasteful, that he could hardly quarrel with his daughter very seriously for the slight thus cast upon his ministrations, and only stipulated that nothing beyond her own pocket-money should be expended in her conveyance to and from the more attractive place of worship.

In one respect at least the clerical brother was more fortunate than the Civil servant,



being blessed with a wife of as equable a temper as ever was given to woman in order to make man happy. Most men, probably, have noticed how much more common it is to meet with a good clergyman's wife than a good clergyman ; all the virtue presumably derived from the bishop's hands and the benediction of the church being as it were strained through the imperfect male medium into the weaker but water-tight vessel. Whatever may be the reason the fact is undeniable, and in placidity and sweetness of temper the incumbent of Lord's-end was certainly surpassed by his wife ; though nothing is hereby meant to be said against the moral excellences of Frank's father, who was undoubtedly as hard-working and conscientious a parson as was to be found within the metropolitan district, and had never flinched from even the most unsavoury of his duties among the residential tradesmen. Yet in the discharge of his family responsibilities the Reverend Mr. Morden was not

always so judicious or tender-hearted as the quiet woman to whom any domestic backslidings were a much sorer affliction; and had his father been as able to interpret the secret of the gorgeous envelopes addressed to Frank as well as the keener feminine discernment, it is probable that the independence of that misguided young gentleman would have met with a less timid rebuke than that which he had successfully resisted.

The bosom of one's family is undoubtedly the cheapest place in which a young man in Frank's position can reside, even when the additional railway fare from such a howling wilderness as Lord's-end to the more habitable parts of London is taken into consideration; but circumstances had lately occurred which had led Frank to doubt whether the total absence of privacy thereby rendered necessary was not rather a dear price to pay even for such advantages. Just at present, he was much annoyed by finding that the things which should have been for his

pride were turned into an occasion of falling.

Young Danebury's faith in the undeniable position and respectability of the young lady he had seen his friend Frank escorting had unfortunately been only too genuine, and though gratifying to that young gentleman's feelings, led to results which were not quite so unobjectionable. As Frank had ostensibly spent that Sunday in thoroughly irreproachable society at Brighton, which he had indeed been accustomed to frequent before he had fallen away from the straight paths in which his boyhood had walked, it was nothing short of a calamity that Danebury, who had been at the Lord's-end parsonage often enough in his school-days now gone by, should have taken the occasion of his meeting Sophy at the Anglican place of worship (which was fashionable in the afternoon) to mention that he had seen Frank at the "Zoo" the Sunday before, "not unaccompanied," to use a classical and expressive

idiom. Sophy's religious principles, whether because or in spite of their Anglican tendency, were sufficiently strong to fill her with a holy horror at the possible depths of iniquity thus laid bare to her innocent gaze ; and having ascertained that her suspicions were at least well founded, she brought the dark mystery (from purely conscientious motives) before the family conclave in solemn form. There was perhaps no great harm in the "Zoo," or even in his having taken a turn there with a well-dressed young woman of prepossessing appearance ; but Frank had distinctly given his family bosom to understand that he had solaced his weary brain on that particular day at Brighton !

Frank was not fond of telling unnecessary falsehoods, or even of adhering too closely to such as he had thought necessary, and confessed, when taxed with his iniquity, that he had allowed a—a misapprehension to prevail.

"The fact was, I meant to go down to Brighton in the morning," he explained, calmly facing the storm, "but I changed my mind."

"My dear boy," said his mother, looking anxiously at the gathering blackness on Mr. Morden's brow, "why didn't you tell us so when you came back? Nobody would have accused you of doing anything wrong then."

Frank simply shrugged his shoulders, declaring that he did not feel called upon to account for the way in which he had spent every hour of his time. At the same time he thought how difficult it would be to enter into the details of his visit to Gotha Street, and the hospitality which the mother of his Lizzie had shown him there.

"I expect you, sir, to spend your time in such a manner that you need not be ashamed to give an account of it, if necessary," said the clergyman sternly. "The fact that you thought it necessary to lie in the matter

makes it difficult to believe that the—the companion with whom you were seen was one in whose society no shame need have been felt. Still, if you can assure me on your honour that it was so, I will not refuse to accept your word.”

Frank, who had on previous occasions been wont to shrink from the paternal wrath, felt comparatively stubborn now, and by no means disposed to give the required assurance in the terms in which it was asked.

“I didn’t consider there was anything to be ashamed of,” he said sullenly. “I don’t suppose you’d have cared about walking with the girl yourself.”

The clergyman cast up his eyes at the hideous suggestion, but could not find words at the moment to express the righteousness of his wrath.

“I suppose Danebury told you she looked respectable,” continued Frank triumphantly, thinking with pride of the salute which the excellence of Lizzie’s ‘form’ had extorted

from that competent authority, and which was now costing him so dear.

"You had better leave my house, sir," said the clergyman, making a motion with his hand as if to put away the unclean thing from him.

"Richard!" said Mrs. Morden appealingly, knowing that Richard was not generally wont to disregard her appeals.

On this occasion, however, the man, who was conscious of his weakness, had determined to be strong.

"Where is he to go?" said the mother, shuddering at the idea that other and less fastidious homes might open to receive the reprobate.

"Perhaps we could get him a room at Bastin's," said Sophy suggestively, who was a little frightened at the thought that she might be called responsible for what was happening.

Bastin was a thoroughly respectable grocer a couple of hundred yards from the parson-

age, who had occasionally accommodated the clergyman's family with a bedroom in such an emergency as the presence of an additional guest. It was an excellent room, and would have been beyond criticism, if only the smell of cheese could have been kept from coming up the passage ; but such a resource was hardly sufficient to solve the present difficulty, and Sophy's suggestion was allowed to fall to the ground.

Frank, who knew very well that his father did not mean to turn him out without a sovereign in his pocket, and could not very well afford to pay for his son's board and lodging elsewhere for the sake of gratifying his ideas of parental discipline, compromised the matter by walking out of the house, and absenting himself for the remainder of the day. It did appear to him very hard that his efforts to obtain congenial society should expose him to this kind of annoyance, and he thought how much pleasanter, after all, had been the way in which Mrs. Deacle had be-



haved on discovering how indiscreet the young people had been.

Nevertheless, he restrained his momentary inclination to go and allow Lizzie's mother to mix him another glass of brandy and water, and walked gloomily about the streets instead, until it was late enough for him to attain the privacy of his own room without a renewal of the parental discipline. He might, of course, have gone to an hotel, but there was no hotel within a couple of miles of Lord's-end, and it would have been necessary to have taken the railway back to town to find one.

It is to be feared that as he prowled about the residential district, he did not feel as well disposed towards his sister Sophy as her well-intentioned suggestion with respect to the accommodation to be obtained at Bastin's deserved.

The next day was a Saturday—the very Saturday with regard to which he had promised to communicate with Miss Deacle—and he managed to get his breakfast and

escape from the house without again sustaining the thunder of his father's ire. As he shook the dust of the house off his feet he felt that he positively loathed Lord's-end, and all the appurtenances thereof, and even the genial squalor of Gotha Street seemed preferable to such an atmosphere of squabbling sanctity.

His mother, fearing that such threats as the clergyman had used might be repeated, had obtained for him since the previous night his quarter's allowance; and with twenty pounds in his pocket he felt almost independent—so independent, indeed, that having put in an appearance at "Chaffin's" for a couple of hours, he left that resort of aspiring youth about one o'clock with a perfect glow of virtue stealing over him, and a keen sense of the undeserved indignities which had been heaped upon his head. As to there being anything at all irregular in his acquaintanceship with Lizzie, surely a man whose affections had just been trampled on by pitiless

heels, as his had been, might be allowed some little latitude in such matters !

That, he felt, was just the point which neither his father nor mother, nor even Sophy, could be expected to understand. Only a man who had suffered as he had done could fully comprehend the necessity under which he laboured of obtaining some kind of relief.

It was the middle of the day by the time that he arrived at this conclusion, and he remembered that his promised communication to Lizzie with respect to his plans for the afternoon had not been made. No doubt Lizzie could have managed some light relaxation for herself in his absence, and would have been wise enough to have thought twice before she quarrelled with him for his non-attendance, but Frank's inclinations just then were such as to cause him to regard the sanctity of his obligation to Lizzie for that afternoon with a most conscientious eye.

It would never do to allow Lizzie to be

punished because there had been a little unpleasantness at Lord's-end, and eventually all this scrupulous reasoning and unselfish determination resulted, of course, in Lizzie being induced to overlook his broken promise of writing, and go down with him to Gravesend for the afternoon.

It did not appear to be necessary that Lizzie should give notice to Mrs. Deacle, or anybody else, of her intention to absent herself till nightfall; but, of course, as she told Frank, her mother knew she wasn't alone, and had unlimited confidence in the honour and integrity of "Mr. Frank."

It was quite certain, at any rate, that in the Deacle household no such accurate account of her time was expected from Miss Lizzie as that demanded by the Lord's-end clergyman from his reprobate offspring.

Frank, whose trust in his twenty pounds at the beginning of every quarter was always quite unbounded, was very free with his money that evening, and ordered their dinner

with so much *insouciance* that Lizzie, not without experience in such matters, was induced to form a higher estimate of his resources than the balance of the twenty pounds quite warranted.

There is probably no error more widely spread among the inferior classes than the idea that the outward manners and semblance of a gentleman are invariably accompanied by financial resources which render the expenditure of a sovereign and a shilling matters of equal indifference. Is there a labourer in the world who would believe, if disappointed in his expectation of a shilling for beer, that the gentleman who withheld the boon did so with any knowledge of the number of shillings in his pocket he might draw upon?

Smoking and drinking coffee in a balcony that overlooks the water, in the soothing society of the one woman in the world who takes the trouble to sympathise with you, is an occupation highly calculated to render the

flight of time less perceptible than usual, and Frank certainly gave less attention to that subject than was quite prudent, considering the *soupeçon* of impropriety which flavoured his presence in that balcony at all.

The last train was to leave for London at a quarter before eleven, and it ought certainly to have been Miss Deacle's especial care that a sufficient margin of time was left, after paying the bill, to insure her return to Gotha Street at least some time that night.

Either the sympathetic influence of Frank's cigar, however, or the witching nature of the situation altogether, prevented Lizzie from being quite as wakeful in the matter as it behoved a young lady to be whose position in life enabled her to dispense with the superfluity of a *chaperon*, and a little delay in changing one of Frank's five-pound notes rendered the situation still more critical.

It only wanted five minutes of the quarter when they at last made their attempt to reach the railway station in time, and the

attempt was then made more with the view of easing their consciences than with any idea that it could be successful.

Of course they saw nothing of the train, and had to make their way back to the hotel they had just quitted without their consciences, or at least one of their consciences, being as much relieved by the exertions they had made as would have been desirable. It was quite evident that Lizzie, at any rate, must stay there for the night.

Frank, who was just a shade alarmed at his position, and very anxious to save Miss Deacle from as much of the embarrassment of the situation as possible, declared that he could walk back to London perfectly well. It was only about twenty miles, at the outside, he thought, to Lord's-end ; or even if he could not get so far, plenty of the public-houses on the way would be open quite early in the morning and he could rough it out easily alone.

There would of course be no difficulty in

obtaining accommodation for Miss Deacle where they were, and as she would be quite unknown, no harm would be done beyond shocking the old lady who had been so ready with her brandy and water.

“I never heard such an idea in my life,” said Lizzie, unwilling that so much discomfort should be incurred solely by reason of her late carelessness. “How can you walk about the country all night by yourself?”

As she certainly did not mean that she would be ready to walk about the country all night with him, it is to be presumed that she did not see the necessity of his walking about at all.

“I don’t mind it a bit,” said Frank, confronting the difficulty manfully. “I could smoke till I was black in the face.”


“Nonsense,” said Lizzie, who had set her face against such folly altogether. “There must be plenty of room in the hotel. You’d better ask them if they can’t give you another room, and sleep here like a Christian.



Then we'll breakfast together in the morning, and nobody need be a bit the wiser. It's all humbug being afraid of what people will say—there isn't anybody to say anything. I don't suppose you'll talk to the Kew people about it."

Frank was not at all disposed in reality to smoke until facial blackness was produced, and began to waver, reflecting that it was almost absurd for two people who were conscious of such complete innocence of design to make themselves absolutely uncomfortable in deference to the prejudices of an evil-thinking world. If Lizzie was not afraid of the authorities at Gotha Street, he certainly did not see why he should consider the people at Kew.

He rang the bell, after a little vacillating, and it was found that the resources of the establishment were equal to the unexpected demand thus made upon them. So he had just one more cigar in the balcony with Lizzie, and then said good-night.



The salute, however, which had followed upon the brandy and water at Gotha Street, was on this occasion, in deference to the peculiarity of their position, tacitly omitted; and Frank was quite convinced, by the time he got to bed, that no exception to the prudence of his conduct in their little dilemma could possibly be taken.

By the time, however, that morning came, the glow of self-satisfaction had a little gone off, and he began to have vague apprehensions that all would not end for him as comfortably as Lizzie had predicted the night before. He felt a cowardly impulse to escape from the place without eating the sociable breakfast which had formed a part of the programme then sketched out for him, paying the bill, and leaving a little note for Lizzie to explain that he had thought it best to take the earliest train, so as to reach Lord's-end in time for morning service, but he was conscious that such an offence would never be forgiven, even by one so ready to make

allowances as Miss Deacle, and felt that he was bound to face the matter out. So he descended very slowly to the coffee-room in which they had ordered breakfast, trying to console himself by the thought that even if he had escaped to Lord's-end in time, the morning service there would not have been a much more pleasant ordeal.

Lizzie was standing with her back to the door, looking out of the bow-window, and did not even look round when she heard the noise of Frank's entrance.

Unfortunately they had the room to themselves, and he felt compelled to try and assume something of the off-hand and *insouciant* manner which had first conciliated Miss Deacle's affections.

"There hasn't been an earthquake in the night, you see," he said cheerfully, approaching the window.

"Oh, Frank, I am so miserable!" said Miss Deacle, disconcerting Frank's well-meant efforts very much by bursting into a passion

of tears, and throwing herself, as if with the hope of irrigating that stony ground, upon his breast.

“My dear Lizzie,” said Frank, a little perplexed by the suddenness of the young lady’s emotion, and with a salutary dread of being discovered by the waiter, or other unprejudiced observers, while under his present difficulties, “what can be the matter?”

“I—don’t—know—what—ever I shall do!” sobbed Lizzie, apparently endeavouring to obtain temporary relief by rubbing her forehead against the buttons of Frank’s coat. “I haven’t had a bit of sleep all night.”

“You’ll be all right when you have had some breakfast,” said Frank encouragingly, trying to persuade himself that the secret of Miss Deacle’s distress lay no deeper. “Soda and milk, you know—have you ever tried that? It’s a capital thing in the morning.”

But the “sweet oblivious antidote” proposed did not seem attractive to Miss Deacle, who began rubbing Frank’s buttons in a

horizontal direction instead of vertically by way of signifying a negative.

“What shall I say to—to them at home?” she managed to gasp out when no further recuperative was suggested. “How ever could I have been such a—such a fool!”

“Why, my dear Lizzie,” said Frank, who felt injured by the inconsistency of his dear Lizzie’s distress, “you didn’t seem to mind it a bit last night. I’m awfully sorry if you think you’ll be bothered about it, but it’s no good making a fuss now. You’d much better come and have some breakfast quietly. There’s some coffee, if you’re sure you don’t care about any soda.”

As to the folly of which the young lady accused herself, Frank felt that the less said the better; at any rate, by him. Lizzie, who by this time had been prevailed upon to disengage herself from the buttons, and was trying the cooling effect of a white pocket-handkerchief, only shook her head convulsively, as if to imply that by no stimulant or

corrective beverage could the tone of a disordered conscience be restored.

"I don't believe mother will let me into the house," she whispered between her sobs, which were coming at regular intervals, in the way in which hiccoughs are wont to afflict their victims, and did not allow of a longer remark being made without interruption. Frank was so confounded by the extraordinary change in Lizzie's demeanour from that which had shown itself nine or ten hours before, that he had not courage to remind her of the very words in which she had declared that the comments of the world on their conduct could be braved with perfect impunity. It did not, however, for a moment occur to him to doubt the reality of her woe; though when she talked about her restless night, he could not help remembering that the strong tendency to fall asleep, which she had displayed in the balcony the previous evening, had not led him to expect that the hours of darkness would be vexed by any

such infliction. He turned abruptly away from the contemplation of her distress, and rang the bell for breakfast, feeling that such a proceeding was the first step, at any rate, towards emancipating himself from the difficulties of his present position. Surely the efforts of other men to obtain momentary oblivion for such sufferings as his were not hampered by difficulties like those which beset him at every turn!

He ate his breakfast almost in silence, and was a little relieved to see that, notwithstanding her reception of his suggestions as to soda-water and coffee, Lizzie was not incapacitated from making a very satisfactory meal. They had to wait until the middle of the day for a train back to town, and perhaps Frank would have found even the morning service at Lord's-end less depressing than the manifestations of Miss Deacle's self-reproach to which he was compelled to listen. Of course he was sorry for her, but the blandishments with which he attempted to soothe

her distress were awkward and clumsily offered. He had sought the attractions of his Lizzie's society, in the first instance, in order that she might console him, and did not at all like the present necessity of reversing the process.

"You'll take me home yourself, won't you?" said Lizzie when they were in the railway-carriage, a considerable hole having been made in one of Frank's five-pound notes before they got away from the scene of their misadventure.

"I suppose so, if you wish it," said Frank gloomily, thinking that his present position would hardly be improved if Lizzie were to take *him* home to Lord's-end. No doubt, however, the denizens of Lord's-end and Gotha Street would look upon matters from a different point of view.

"I daren't go home at all, if you don't," said Lizzie, beginning to sob again, and rejecting altogether the caresses with which Frank, moved almost to despair, attempted



to stanch the flow of her grief. "Father'd half kill me, if he fancied anything was wrong. He's an awful brute sometimes."

It must be remembered that the terrors of Deacle *père* had not yet been presented to Frank, and he almost shuddered at the prospect of this addition to the amenities he might expect at Gotha Street.

"I'll do anything you like," he said, feeling that the hiccoughs, or sobs, must be checked at any price; "only you mustn't cry like that. What on earth is there to cry about? I tell you I'll do anything you want."

"I don't believe you would," said Lizzie between the sobs. "You wouldn't marry me if it was ever so. There isn't any good pretending you're really sorry for me, or you wouldn't have got me into this mess. You were glad enough of anybody to be sorry for you, but it's no good talking. Wh—what a fool I was!"

This sort of thing went on most of the way up to London, so that their return was

by no means so pleasant as the journey down had been, and Frank had enjoyed quite enough of his companion's society by the time they had got into a cab for Gotha Street. He would willingly enough have done something to compensate Lizzie for the disagreeable consequences of his imprudence, but there was a grim sort of comedy about the matrimonial suggestion, at which he could almost have laughed, even in the midst of his troubles. Eighty pounds a year at present, with the prospect of a subaltern's pay when he had done with Chaffin's, would hardly, he thought, tempt Lizzie to leave her post of dignity behind the bar at her uncle's eating-house ; and he felt so sure of the scorn with which that young lady would have received a candid account of his financial position, that he did not think it necessary to repudiate her suggestion quite as energetically as would perhaps have been prudent. It should be remembered that nothing about Lizzie was even yet distasteful to him ; even her distress

had been rendered less unpleasant to him than it otherwise would have been by the efforts he had been allowed to make to soothe it; and it would have been repugnant to his feelings to have been compelled to tell her point-blank that he had no more intention of marrying her than of marrying her mother. He did not, in fact, believe that she had been quite in earnest when she made such a suggestion, looking upon her—quite justly—as a good deal too shrewd to labour under any misapprehension in the matter.

By the time Gotha Street was reached, Miss Deacle had conquered her emotion, symptoms of amelioration having set in as soon as the familiar purlieus of the New Road came in view, almost as if the monumental graves and plaster-of-Paris trophies, with which that thoroughfare is decorated, exercised some occult and soothing influence over her soul. It really seemed as if some sympathetic instinct had taught her what would be expected of her by the family

authorities ; for certainly the greeting which awaited the truants would have rendered any violent display of penitence incongruous and absurd. The old lady who looked so like a sack of meat opened the door, as she had done on a former occasion, and though she looked a little grave at first, welcomed Mr. Frank, when he had done paying the cabman, with quite her old effusiveness.

“Lor, Lizzie, you’ve given us such a fright !” she exclaimed. “Your father was just talking about putting a notice in the paper about you.”

Probably Mr. Deacle’s connection with the *Echo* offered him certain facilities for advertising at a reduced rate, and Frank shuddered at the thought of the ubiquitous little red carts being posted with handbills, setting out the details of his personal appearance.

“Don’t make a fuss, mother,” said Lizzie, entering the house with as much composure as if she had just come back from church.

"Just tell father he needn't trouble himself, while I put off my hat."

Frank felt compelled to follow the old woman into the house, seeing that Lizzie had evidently no idea of his deserting her yet, though he would have given the remainder of his twenty pounds with pleasure to have been allowed to leave her to get through the rest of her troubles unsupported.

"I don't know what her father 'ull say, Mr. Frank," said the old woman, leering at him; "but you'd better come in and put it all straight."

"There's nothing to put straight, Mrs. Deacle," said Frank, with as brazen a look as innocence could wear; "but of course I'll come in for a minute. I haven't much time to spare, all the same."

The man who was connected with the distribution of the *Echo* had not apparently been expecting visitors, as he was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, smoking, and apparently as

little distressed by his daughter's defalcation as could have been wished.

"Glad to see you," he said jovially, as Frank entered. "So you've brought my girl back all right? I don't know as there's any other man as I'd have trusted her with but you, but then I know a gentleman when I sees him."

"There's no harm done, Mr. Deacle," said Frank, who was relieved by the man's friendly tone. "The truth is, a lot of us went down to dine at Gravesend last night, and we missed the last train back. I thought I'd better bring her home myself, just to show you all was right. She's been frightening herself a good deal about nothing."

"There ain't no reason for her to be frightened," said the man, and it certainly did seem as if Lizzie's terrors had been rather exaggerated. "I always says my mind, and then there's an end of it. You're not above sitting down and having some-

thing to drink ? I know mine's a poor place for a gentleman."

Frank, who began to think that he and Lizzie had been making a mountain out of a molehill, would have drunk out of the man's pot if he had thought Mr. Deacle would have been conciliated by such a condescension, and made no difficulty about the festivity in which it was proposed to drown the memory of the past. Lizzie, having washed away the traces of her emotion, came down and mixed his brandy and water with her own fair hands, and an additional air of comfort was given to the whole proceeding by the gusto with which the fat old lady partook of a similar beverage. There was a strong smell of Irish stew in the room, and a suspicious appearance of an unmade bed in one of the corners, but it was all very peaceful and unconstrained, and Frank felt that he had been doing Mr. and Mrs. Deacle an injustice. He was certainly being let off as easy as his most sanguine hopes could

have anticipated, and began to congratulate himself upon the peculiar tact and readiness to adapt himself to his company which was apparently serving him so well.

It was two o'clock by the time he was allowed to take his departure, the greater part of a bottle of brandy having been consumed in his honour, and the cordiality of the leave-taking left nothing to be desired.

"I always likes to see a gentleman in my house," said Mr. Deacle, knocking out the ashes from his last pipe, and rising to speed the parting guest.

Lizzie said nothing, but a convulsive pressure of the hand betrayed that the volcano within was hardly yet quiescent.

"I suppose you'll be about here again soon, Mr. Frank," said the fat woman, with the leer that was the most unpleasant thing Frank had met with in the house. "Only there oughtn't to be any more trains missed!"



## CHAPTER XV.

PERHAPS the period popularly assigned for the perfect assimilation of husband and wife, as necessary before the two elements can blend into a new chemical form fit for the ordinary purposes of life, is too short. Perhaps such assimilation, even under the most favourable circumstances, is too difficult. At any rate it would be interesting, perhaps salutary, if statistics could tell us in how many cases the honeymoon waxes and wanes, without doing anything towards reconciling the antagonistic principles which must be found, more or less, in every two individual specimens of the human race. It would be unpleasant to believe that in the majority of instances the

antagonism is more conspicuous than before the stripping off of the graceful robes, in which love, while still expectant, is wont to drape the intellectual and moral being ; but it certainly often happens that the mystic period has no other achievement to boast of, and no doubt, to a student of anatomy, there is an advantage in getting at the bones of a subject as soon as possible. Lena Selfert, however, felt it as her chief disappointment that she was unable to get at her husband's mental and moral bones at all, so carefully were they swathed and put away from view. He was a man who almost appeared to consider it a kind of indecency to expose his bare naked mind to the eyes of any human being, and scrupulously pulled the nearest covering at hand over it, at the least appearance of peeping. Not wishing himself to intrude upon other people's minds, he could not understand why they should take an interest in his, and had certainly not married a wife with any such view. Those who knew him best, being

for the most part those who attempted to know him least, were at some loss to discover why he had married a wife at all.

For whatever reason he had done so, Rothery Selfert did not attempt to disguise from himself his extreme satisfaction when the month at Ilfracombe came to an end, and he was permitted to return to his ordinary avocations. There had been no *data* in his mind from which he could form an estimate of the amount of gratification to be derived from the society of a woman like Lena Morden, and he had been perhaps a little disappointed at the result. He had no doubt that she admired and respected him quite as much as he thought it probable that any woman would be found to do, but he certainly could have wished that her admiration and respect had assumed a slightly more passive form. There was a visible straining after some theory of identification with her husband which had formed itself in the girl's mind, which appeared to him so out of place as to

be almost ludicrous. He hoped that this was only the result of the entire novelty of her position, and as he had not calculated upon this feature in her character, felt that, if it was more than a temporary phenomenon, it was likely to become an intense bore. Nevertheless, he still hoped that the idea of domestic felicity which he had conceived would be realised as soon as the girl from whom he had hoped so much had settled down quietly to the routine of every-day life. To read the *Times* every day under such uncomfortable conditions as he had done at Watermouth Castle would, he felt, be a serious drawback to the necessary tranquillity of his existence.

They came back to London at the end of October, a house having been taken for them in Wimpole Street, not exactly by Lena's choice, for the selection she had been nominally invited to make had been considerably circumscribed by the suggestions the bridegroom had deemed it within his province to

make. As to the furnishing, that had been principally done by Brooking, who had consented to assume the responsibility of superintending it at his master's request; though perhaps such matters did not, strictly speaking, fall within the radius of the duties of a barrister's clerk. However, Brooking had sacrificed part of his vocation to the task of making the necessary arrangements, and Lena felt that it would be ungracious to quarrel with the results he had achieved. She would have liked to have chosen her own carpets, being not exempt from the weakness which is common to brides, but had not ventured to insist upon such an inclination when the subject was mooted before the wedding day.

Mr. Selfert had, indeed, suggested that she should make a sort of picnic some day with Brooking to a great emporium in Holborn recommended by that invaluable functionary, and had offered to spare half an hour to meet her in the city for lunch, but Lena

had felt sure that he wished her to decline, and had done so accordingly with the best grace in the world. She did not, however, feel free from certain misgivings that Brooking would almost expect a voice in choosing the guests to sit round the excellent mahogany table which he had regarded as perhaps his most judicious purchase.

Mr. Selfert lost no time in intimating to his wife, after their installation in Wimpole Street, that he wished the merits of the mahogany table to be tested, and a list of guests was handed to her, in the preparation of which she by no means felt sure that Brooking had not had some part. Stonely, who had of course been made Solicitor-General, in accordance with the prophecy of the *Thunderer* and the general opinion of the profession, was to be the Q.C.'s most honoured guest, though unfortunately there was no Lady Stonely who could be asked to accompany him. Stonely, following the example which has been set by so many pillars

of the law, had unfortunately married a lady whose only fault had been that she had consented to defer that ceremony a little longer than is usual in good society. However, there was no difficulty in supplying the vacancy thus caused, and Mrs. Selfert was to be supported at her dinner-table by at least one judge's wife, in addition to two of the lesser luminaries of the profession, better halves and all. That the legal flavour at the festive board might not be too strong, literature was represented in the person of Mr. Dunkerry Smith. Mr. Dunkerry Smith was the successful editor of the *Periodic Review*, a publication which had higher aims and motives than the ephemeral, hebdomadal, or even the monthly rivals which crowded its path. Its distinguishing feature, when it first appeared, was its announced intention of instructing and admonishing the world three times, and three times only, in every year; the idea being presumably that as there were so few men capable of worthily filling

its columns, care must be taken that no unhealthy pressure was put upon the gradual emanations of such refined minds. If conception in the brain of each contributor to the *Periodic* followed immediately upon the issue of a number, it was assumed that a period of four months would be sufficient for gestation, allowing for two or three weeks wet-nursing in the printer's office. As the undertaking had prospered, it must be supposed that the idea was a sound one. The *Periodic* had already established for itself a name in philosophical circles, and Rothery Selfert was by no means the most distinguished of those who were reported to be contributors to its pages.

Mr. Dunkerry Smith was a man of middle age, with a bulbous forehead and chin that enclosed no other feature of any significance, and very little sandy hair, that had the appearance of being extremely firmly rooted in very barren ground. It cannot be said that he was an ornament to the dinner-table,



especially as (owing to the very pronounced opinions held by the editor of the *Periodic* on the relations of matrimony to the state and the individual) there was no Mrs. Dunkerry to set him off.

With a description of guests to which she was entirely unaccustomed on her hands, Mrs. Selfert was not free from doubt as to the order and disposition of such incongruous elements. In particular, she was extremely puzzled to know what she ought to do with one Mr. Hurst Atlee, of whom she knew absolutely nothing until he entered her drawing-room.

Hurst Atlee was Mr. Selfert's "devil," or rather, had "devilled" for Mr. Selfert a good deal a few years back, and still did a little in the demoniacal line when cases of emergency arose. It may be necessary to explain, for the benefit of those to whom the *arcana* of the courts are altogether unknown, that "devilling" is the term applied to the system by which one barrister with a small

practice, or oftener with no practice at all, relieves the necessities of a greater favourite of fortune—and of attorneys—who has more on his hands than his individual efforts can deal with. As the devil is almost invariably unpaid, either by his employer or his employer's clients, it must be presumed that there are contingent advantages, known only to the initiated, which induce devils to spend their energies thus gratuitously.

Mr. Hurst Atlee had grown rather tired of unprofitable devilry, undertaken at Rothery Selfert's request, but had been careful not to detach himself entirely from the skirts of his successful patron, looking forward no doubt to the time when the rich man's table should have its splendours so augmented that crumbs would fall from it in greater profusion. In the meantime, the unsuccessful barrister had grown almost indispensable to the successful one, and notwithstanding the fact that he was greatly the junior of the two, had perhaps achieved something more

like friendship with the elder man than any of the latter's contemporaries had managed.

There was no lady for Mr. Hurst Atlee to take in to dinner at the new house in Wimpole Street, as the male element so largely predominated in the list which had been handed to Lena as her instructions for the feast. Fortunately, Mr. Dunkerry Smith was similarly left out in the cold, and the two men, who knew each other well enough, sat together at dinner.

The editor of the *Periodic* was disappointed in Rothery Selfert, having always flattered himself that he had succeeded in impressing some part of his own views as to the abstract disadvantages of matrimony upon the barrister.

"Rash experiment of Selfert's, this, don't you fancy so?" he said as they were going down the stairs to his companion.

Hurst Atlee looked at him as if he was speaking Chinese. It was the peculiarity of

Hurst Atlee to take almost every possible occasion of giving his fellow-creatures the idea that he could not understand them, nor they him. He belonged in truth to a different order of animal from that of which Mr. Dunkerry Smith was a specimen, and though he too had on one occasion contributed something to the pages of the *Periodic*, did not by any means hold the same theories as to the proper function of woman which were part of the religion of its editor. Perhaps his own external appearance had unconsciously modified his views on such subjects, for Hurst Atlee was the last man in the world to ignore the fact of his own personal beauty, or to neglect the advantages which it procured for him in his intercourse with the other sex. He was consequently quite satisfied with the *régime* under which he lived, and by no means disposed to the ideas for the subversion of social relations generally of which Mr. Dunkerry Smith was an ardent propagandist.

Hurst Atlee looked at Mr. Selfert's "ex-

periment " with considerable interest as she sat at the bottom of the table, with a *puisne* judge on one side of her, and the new Solicitor-General on the other, and wondered whether it was possible that a woman with eyes like hers could possibly have anything in common with the "*perfricta frons*" of the man who had taken her to amuse so much of him as was not spent in the daily dredging of his profession.

" I shouldn't think Selfert runs much risk," he said sententiously, in reply to his companion. "*She* may."

" I don't know that," said Mr. Dunkerry Smith. " She *looks* good, you see; and I have a theory that the more perfectly candid and pure the expression in a woman's face, the more dangerous is what lies beneath. Just look at the portraits of 'Carita,' as she calls herself, flaunting in every photographer's shop in London—did you ever see a face that expressed more apparent sweetness and innocence? If you think for a moment of

the women you have known, you will find half a dozen illustrations of my meaning."

"Your meaning, my dear Smith," said the younger man, "is always past my finding out. I take your word for it that you *have* a meaning, at least in the majority of cases, but upon my soul I very seldom see it!"

He bent forward a little as he spoke, endeavouring to catch a full view of the gracious beauty of his hostess, which appeared so ominous of misfortune to Rothery Selfert in his companion's eyes. She had not spared him a word or a look yet, except the conventional smile that his introduction rendered necessary when he first entered, and it chafed him to think that she was, and always would be, compelled to devote herself to such incongruous surroundings as Stonely and his satellites, instead of basking in the sunlight of devotion which she seemed to have been created to attract.

Was it possible that she could have sacrificed herself willingly to such a cheerless

destiny? he wondered, looking from the soft face, on which light from some unseen source seemed always playing, to the ponderous unsympathetic brow on which she had, he supposed, pressed bridal kisses of some sort.

"Psha!" he muttered to himself, rejecting the *entrée* which came round at that moment. "As if women did not do it every day! Why, in Heaven's name, should her caresses be more sacred than those of others?"

Hurst Atlee had rather the reputation of being a brilliant talker, but he had sat silent enough during the greater part of that dinner, it being quite unnecessary for any one to assist the host in the task of securing the table from the blight of silence.

Rothery Selfert had not, indeed, the knack of talking from the heart, or even of appearing to do so, but he loved, on occasions, to listen to the gentle thunder of his own voice, and on this particular evening his conversational energy was perhaps a shade too obtrusive. It was almost a relief, at least to one of

the party, when all the eminent lawyers present declared that they had drunk enough claret, and they went in to the further relief of the bride, who had been getting rather mauled by the judge's wife in the drawing-room for the last half hour.

"Atlee will give us some music, I have no doubt, if you ask him," said Mr. Selfert to his wife, rather as if he was speaking of one of his possessions to another of them. For men like Atlee, Mr. Selfert considered that music was an eminently suitable accomplishment, and he felt proud of displaying his *protégé's* powers.

"If Mrs. Selfert has any—any interest in that kind of thing," said the younger man, looking for the first time full into Lena's eyes, "I shall be delighted."

He did not wait for an answer, but sat down at the piano, and dashed into Chopin's weird and fantastic music, as if he neither knew nor cared whether any of his hearers could understand or appreciate it.



"I don't think I caught that young man's name," whispered the judge to his host when he got up from the piano.

The judge was an old gentleman of benevolent and bird-like aspect, who had for years been in the habit of keeping his energies awake for such nocturnal dissipation by the simple process of going to sleep in court for a quarter of an hour, at three o'clock regularly every day.

"Atlee? Did you say he practised at all?"

"He's held a brief or two for me at odd times," said the successful barrister. "I think he'll do something."

"Clever, I dare say," said the old gentleman, who had not got over the effect of Chopin, "but—hardly professional!"

The old gentleman, however, meant only to disparage Hurst Atlee's law, and not his music, which he did not understand. Meanwhile Mr. Atlee had made his way to Lena's side, being a man who liked very much to be appreciated, and to hear of his appreciation.

"Yes, Mrs. Selfert," he said, "I play a good deal. In such a legal atmosphere as this, it sounds rather incongruous, I dare say."

Lena's ideas of what was professional were not so strict as those of the eminent legal luminary, and possibly she was not yet acquainted with the density of the atmosphere of which Hurst Atlee spoke. It did strike her, however, after a moment or too, that she had never thought of expecting music from Rothery Selfert.

"I suppose there is no reason," she said, "why a barrister should give up all his tastes and pursuits for one idea."

"You have hardly become thoroughly imbued with the true professional spirit yet, Mrs. Selfert," said Atlee half ironically. "Of course a man like Mr. Selfert may keep as many ideas as he likes; but ask him some day what he thinks of my versatility."

It was impossible, of course, to imagine the faintest dream of a sarcasm on her hus-

band in his *protégé's* words, but had he been speaking of any other man, Lena could have believed that there was something very like a covert sneer beneath the comparison. She moved away, a little puzzled and displeased. There could hardly at that moment have been a greater offence in her eyes than the assumption of knowing her husband better than she was capable of doing.

Atlee walked home with Mr. Dunkerry Smith until their roads diverged, but listened rather more silently than was his wont to that ungallant gentleman's exposition of *Periodic* philosophy.

"A man can't help thinking, when he sees a marriage like that," said the editor. "Surely a sufficient proportion of our male population are driven by the strongest of all impulses into matrimony, without men of maturer age and no impulses at all rushing into the same error in obedience to the mere conventionalities of society! I can conceive such a social regeneration as will render

motives of both kinds, at any rate, far less universal in their action; and such a change would be for the good of mankind at large."

"You can't say now they are universal, as long as you and I are left," said Atlee, who was indisposed to grapple seriously with the difficulty of the subject. "There's something pulling the other way, I suppose."

"You ought to know that nothing is so illogical as a personal application of a principle," said Mr. Dunkerry Smith, who did not like to have his own impulses discussed, and by no means confided his individual experiences to the pages of the *Periodic*. "I don't ask you to tell me why you never married, you know."

"No, my dear fellow," answered his companion. "I can never sufficiently admire the delicacy with which, while tickling dangerous ground with the point of your toe, you never overstep the line. I am afraid we part company here."

The editor of the *Periodic* was never quite sure that Atlee was not laughing at him, and walked off with a little justifiable irritation.

"Pah!" said Hurst Atlee to himself as he lit a cigar, "the cursed self-satisfaction of that ape always makes me sick! I believe I'm the only man in the world who is *not* satisfied with himself, as far as he can see."

There may have been some self-satisfaction to be got out of even this thought, but it could hardly have been of a very pleasurable kind, judging by the settled cloud on the thinker's brow, as he let himself into his chambers. Probably he was not satisfied with them either, as they were certainly not the rooms of a man who indulged himself recklessly in external comforts, and wore as cheerless an aspect as any misanthrope could have well desired in what he called his home. A piano littered with music was almost the only visible instance of luxury, and a hideous wooden table, covered with hopeless-looking

manuscript and dirty blotting-paper, took off all the genial effect which such a token of refinement might have produced.

There are plenty of comfortable, even luxurious, sets of chambers in the Temple, but those at the top of Vernon Buildings were probably built with a view to the more incidental advantages of cheapness and seclusion—advantages which it is not easy to secure in such localities without penetrating through a considerable husk of dirt. Like the sparks in the experience of the preacher, the dirt of London has a general tendency to fly upward.

There was a letter on the table, which, in default of a better, is something of a welcome when a man comes home for the night; but Hurst Atlee pitched it into the fire, after glancing at its contents, without the cloud on his brow losing anything of its gloom.

“On my thirty-first birthday,” he said to himself, with a short laugh as he did so, “I might have asked them to have drunk my health to-night at dinner.”

He threw himself into the arms of a ragged arm-chair, as if that was the only kindly embrace he had ever known, and proceeded to honour the anniversary by as wholesomely bitter a reverie on the result of thirty-one years as the most stringent moralist could have desired. Perhaps, if he had kept a diary, he would have written a little instead of thinking much; but it may safely be affirmed that no man ever trusted to the most subjective of journals such maunderings as the following:

“D——d self-satisfied idiot! Talks as if the world was full of herrings! . . . . I wonder where he picked up such a girl as that; I wonder whether she jumped down his throat directly he opened it!” (It may be presumed that the image of Mr. Dunkerry Smith here ceased to occupy the thinker’s mind.) “An impostor like that always has the devil’s own luck. . . . I don’t know that he’s an impostor either—the biggest fools always let the lesser ones come

to the top. . . . Thirty-one years! Kick over the cradle and jump into the coffin! In you go!"

He moved impatiently as he spoke, as if the coffin did not feel prospectively satisfactory either, and levelled a curse at somebody's head—certainly not his own or that of Mr. Dunkerry Smith. Listening to the heartiness of the malediction, one might perhaps have guessed that the man's heart and soul were steeped in biting, corrosive envy—the envy of a man who sees all the ideal objects of his own fervent desire in the cold, careless grasp of another, and clutches himself at empty air.

"The softest places, and the choicest food, and the best women, are all picked out for those who can't care much about them, it seems to me. Some of these days, when I am beginning to drivel and babble, I suppose I shall get my turn at them too. . . . What an intolerably offensive prig that fellow Selfert has grown! I wonder if he ever



speaks to that poor woman when he's alone with her. I wonder how she likes it if he doesn't—or if he does. I don't know that I'm not rather a fool to sit up here smoking any longer. I must knock off a pipe a day, I fancy. I know I've been looking confoundedly seedy lately. Thirty-one! and ten years ago I made up my mind that the only part of life worth a man's living was that under five and twenty. I suppose it's all for the best—those d——d attorneys won't believe in a man unless he looks like a corpse. Into the coffin, as fast as you can!—that's the moral of it all. I suppose I shall be all right to-morrow morning."

With which consolatory reflection the thinker threw his legs over the side of the metaphorical sepulchre into which he had been trying to fit himself, and got into bed instead.

"Indigestion, I suppose," he murmured as he dropped off placidly to sleep; "I know I shall be all right in the morning. Must

have a *mauvais quart d'heure* now and then !”

It has been mentioned that Mr. Rothery Selfert had a salutary habit of guarding against the possibility of a *mauvais quart d'heure* so produced by the simple but prosaic means of a vegetable pill. Men have hardly accustomed themselves, however, to such precautions at the age of thirty-one, being perhaps not quite able to detect the nature of their own symptoms until a longer experience has made them familiar. As Hurst Atlee, without being unusually precocious, had arrived at this stage of perception, it may be presumed that he was not entirely wrong in anticipating his own development into the mental and physical state which he found so unattractive in Rothery Selfert. At any rate, Rothery Selfert was much too far advanced in wisdom to indulge himself in thinking about coffins while consuming his last nocturnal cigar.

“Don't take too much notice of that fellow

Atlee," he said to his wife before retiring for the night. "He's just the man to get insufferably conceited if a little attention is shown him."

"I don't suppose he's likely to be spoilt by *my* attentions," said Lena, smiling. "He doesn't give me the impression of being what you would call a contented man?"

"He's the most dissatisfied prig I know," said the successful barrister. "I don't know what those fellows expect—some of them seem to think the world was created for them to grow their moustache in."

"Is he at all—intimate—with you?" asked Lena, who had not herself formed such an unfavourable opinion of the subject of their discussion, but would have rejected with scorn the suggestion that his personal appearance had anything to do with it.

"Intimate!" said her husband, with something of reproof at such a monstrous suggestion. "He's a man who has often been useful to me, and one must acknowledge the fact

now and then. I dare say you'll see him here often enough."

"Then I certainly won't spoil him by too much attention," said Lena, smiling again.

It was so seldom that her husband had pulled aside his robes and allowed her to glance at any of his real thoughts. She felt really grateful to Mr. Hurst Atlee for having been the occasion of her being indulged in such a familiarity. As she dropped off to sleep, she almost hoped—what she had nearly given up hoping—that she might one day become intimate with the man who had chosen her for his wife.

END OF VOL. I.







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